

**FALSE PROPHETS IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW,
WHO ARE THEY?**

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DEDICATION

To my wife, Katrina, and to our children
Rachael, Regina, Allen, Donnie, and Lavone

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ABSTRACT

This project/dissertation describes and identifies false prophets referred to in the three occurrences in the Gospel of Matthew. As an act of ministry, the candidate conducted three seminar sessions with twenty-two individuals—leaders and lay members—to determine if the studies had any effect upon their thinking concerning who false prophets are in Matthew.

The idea for this project/dissertation came about in reaction to the many Church of Christ periodicals that cite Matthew 7:15 against anyone who dares to differ with the interpretative church of which it is affiliated. The phrase “false prophets” is used so loosely by many well-meaning Christians that it seemed that a study of the context of the three occurrences of this phrase might assist Christians in interpreting these verses in light of its context.

This project/dissertation analyzed a number of journal articles and books by various Christian writers that relied upon Matthew 7:15 to uphold their actions of separation from other Christians that do not concur with their particular interpretation of certain Scriptures. Also, this project/dissertation looked at the in-fighting that is currently going on within the Churches of Christ nation-wide.

The objective of this project/dissertation was to identify who the false prophets were to whom Jesus referred when He employed this phrase. In order to accomplish this objective, it was necessary to analyze the complete Gospel of Matthew from a narrative perspective in order to get a wide overview of the entire book. One of the things discovered in this project/dissertation is that one of the central themes of the book centered on the “identity” of Jesus Christ. Also, ethics played a major role in determining the identity of the false prophets.

Ultimately, an analysis of Matthew 24 revealed that the false prophets were the religious leaders of Israel. In the course of the project, twenty-two people participated in a four-hour study on False Prophets in the Gospel of Matthew, Who Are They? The objective was to determine if there would be any change in their thinking by analyzing the three occurrences of this phrase in Matthew by observing context. Thus, a pre-test and a post-test were administered to derive the statistical data to see if the seminar made any difference in their concepts.

The project results are: Both leaders and lay members developed their methodologies in applying Biblical interpretation to their understanding of the written Word. Preachers and elders are better equipped to interpret Scripture according to context. This intense study about false prophets in the Gospel of Matthew enabled the participants, as a whole, to interpret the phrase “false prophets” in light of its context.

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The candidate would first like to acknowledge the rich blessings that the Lord Jesus has bestowed upon his life. Since becoming a Christian in 1949, the candidate has been guided by God through many changes that have led to personal growth and development. God in His mercy allowed him to enter Southern Christian University in 1987 to begin in-depth studies that eventually concluded with the Doctor of Ministry.

Even though it is impossible to list all who have contributed to the completion of this project/dissertation; nevertheless, many whose help has been invaluable must be recognized. The work could not have been done without them.

Dr. Loyd Melton not only served as Chairman of my dissertation committee, he was a source of encouragement through the two-year program of study. The candidate is thankful for his assistance and for his stimulus to bring this project/dissertation to completion.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. And, I suppose I should add, it is traditionalism that gives tradition such a bad name. The reformers of every age, whether political or religious or literary, have protested against the tyranny of the dead, and in doing so have called for innovation and insight in place of tradition.^[1]

This dissertation is designed to assist elders, preachers, and members within the Churches of Christ to become more adept in correctly handling the Word of God (2 Timothy 2:15).^[2] In order to accomplish this goal, it is my intention to share with leaders and members the tools needed to recapture the art of how to read the Bible in order to maintain the unity for which Jesus prayed in His priestly prayer (John 17:20-23). This first chapter analyzes Paul's handling of differences within the congregations at Rome and Corinth. This summary demonstrates that imperfection in understanding does not, in and of itself, warrant the stigma of false prophets as a result of misinterpretation. Also this chapter discusses the failure on the part of many Christians in their oversight to differentiate between certain views that have contributed to a breakdown of unity among God's people.

To illustrate the importance of the unity for which Jesus prayed, Paul is called upon to emphasize the urgency of the matter. It is in this regard that Paul pleaded with Christians at Ephesus to "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). This mandate is essential on the part of every believer in order to fulfill the prayer of Jesus for unity so that the world may believe. Not only did Paul plead with the Ephesians, he also encouraged the Christians in Rome to "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Romans 15:7). Since God accepted them with imperfection in their lives and in their knowledge, then Paul called upon them to exercise the same kind of love and forbearance toward their fellow Christians for whom Christ died. The purpose of Jesus' prayer is not realized by many devout Christians because they do not discern who is or who is not a false prophet in the light of the context of Matthew's narrative. Since Jesus prayed for oneness and Paul also called for union, then this paper explores ways to bring about the fulfillment of Jesus' and Paul's prayer for singularity of purpose.

Since my personal ministry is primarily confined within the parameters of the Churches of Christ, I feel that a part of my ministry is to help correct the abuses of God's Word handed down to us from our forefathers within the Churches of Christ. This movement (Campbell/Stone) started out as a unity movement, but soon crystallized into warring factions, each promoting its own brand of Christianity.^[3] Today, for example, within the Churches of Christ, one soon discovers that there are approximately twenty-five divisions – each claiming to be the loyal church.

Each group maintains that it is speaking where the Bible speaks and is silent where the Bible is silent. For one not to subscribe to the orthodoxy of a particular group is to receive the label false prophet. Whenever a distinctive religious group sets forth its interpretation of a singular Scripture, then for one to disagree with that traditional exposition is tantamount to disagreeing with God Himself. In this philosophy of explanation, one does not distinguish between one's critique of God's Word and the Word of God itself. If one group sets forth a perception of Scripture that does not conform to the status quo of another camp, then the "at odds" fellowship is accused of not speaking where the Bible speaks.

Unity among many Churches of Christ is based upon conformity, not unity in diversity. But numerous Churches of Christ are returning to the Biblical concept of unity in diversity. And, as a result of this stance on unity in diversity by many elders and preachers, the unity in conformity group labels the unity in diversity fellowship as false teachers or liberal brethren. ^[4] ^[5]

Today, the Churches of Christ are hopelessly engaged in combat. These skirmishes are based upon a faulty reading of many Scriptures that are employed as means of justification for separation from other Christians. One such Scripture is Matthew 7:15: “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.” ^[6]

In order to combat this loose type of explanation, it is necessary for me to expound upon the principles of examination to combat an illegal use of Scriptures to foster division. The Word of God provides its own environment for a proper understanding of its teachings. This dissertation explores the presupposition that false prophets in the Gospel of Matthew are not necessarily individuals who fail to make clear the Scriptures, but rather the false prophets are individuals whose ethical behavior is not in harmony with God’s law. To accomplish this target of correctly identifying the false prophets in the Gospel of Matthew, this dissertation sets forth various standards of exposition on how to read the Scriptures with understanding—especially narrative interpretation. ^[7]

In other words, this dissertation studies in detail the context in which the phrase “false prophets” occurs, and also deals with obstacles that might hinder a proper application of a healthy understanding as to whom the phrase false prophets designates. This in-depth development of context ^[8] is essential for proper growth and development and unity in God’s *ekklesia* (church). To facilitate the usefulness of contextual studies, this chapter briefly explores two congregations in Biblical times in which differences existed in order to help believers in Christ today to determine how Christians should react to similar circumstances in which deficiency in knowledge was prevalent.

THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH

Within the Churches of Christ, the epithet false prophet is assigned to individuals who do not subscribe to a particular interpretation of a distinctive fellowship. Correctness in doctrine, according to some, is the measurement of right standing before God. Imperfection in one’s knowledge calls forth the title of false prophet. Since this project/dissertation is concerned about the identification of false prophets in the Gospel of Matthew, then an analysis of certain historical situations in the New Testament should help to dispel an incorrect classification as to who is and who is not a false prophet in Matthew’s gospel.

Paul rebukes the Corinthians for not making allowances for shortcomings in understanding among some believers in the congregation. Paul calls attention in his first letter to Corinth to a wrong perception of correctness as the criterion by which one is placed in a right relationship with God.

Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God (1 Corinthians 8:1-3).

Paul did not castigate those with imperfection in knowledge as false teachers/prophets. As one peruses the various citations from Scripture, one immediately recognizes that deformity in knowledge does not necessarily mean that one is a false teacher. In the Corinthian letter, Paul is

clearly dealing with insufficient knowledge and one's relationship to God—a relationship based upon love, not upon absolute knowledge.

Paul develops in the Corinthian letter the concept that God loves the person with limited knowledge as well as the person with clear insight. With Paul, as long as one loves God—in spite of deficiency in aptitude—this person is acceptable to God. The “intent of the heart” does play an important role in deciding who is and who is not acceptable to God. Paul further demonstrates the principle of love and relationship in the following comments about idols and one's belief system:

So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. But not everyone knows this (1 Corinthians 8:4-7a).

THE ROMAN CHURCH

To set the stage for sounder principles of hermeneutics, a brief reflection upon Romans 14 and 15 should shed further light on how Paul reacted toward those whose knowledge was deficient. In these two chapters, Paul deals with those who wanted to make exact interpretation the criterion by which one determines one's faithfulness or unfaithfulness to God. The first four verses of chapter 14 demonstrate forcefully Paul's attitude in this matter of reception and rejection. Paul captures this spirit of patience in graphic language in this letter to Rome.

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand (Romans 14:1-4).

Paul did not accuse the misinformed as being false prophets/teachers, but rather he rebuked those who passed judgment on those who were mistaken. God can make one stand even with deformity in one's knowledge.

DIFFERENTIATION OF CONCEPTS

This project/dissertation seeks to eliminate the confusion of certain terms that encourages and promotes division within the Churches of Christ. In not distinguishing between certain terms exercised by the Spirit, many Christians have brought about chaos in the *ekklesia* of God and are hopelessly divided into numerous camps. Part of the problem lies with the failure to differentiate adequately between terms employed by various branches within the Churches of Christ. For example, one's delinquency in not differentiating between *unity* and *fellowship*, *unity* and *conformity*, *fellowship* and *agreement*, *gospel* and *doctrine*, and *fellowship* and *endorsement* has contributed to a proliferation of sects within the Churches of Christ. And an inexact use of the above terms continues to uphold the orthodoxy of each divided circle. Thus, when one does not make proper applications of the various phrases employed among many Christians, then this lack of proper differentiation contributes to an abuse of the phrase “false prophets.”

By distinguishing between specific key phrases adopted by many, this clarification of understanding will help to clear away the underbrush that prevents Christians from properly interpreting false prophets in the book of Matthew. By eliminating certain presuppositions, one can approach the text without a lot of excess baggage. The following scenario is a brief analysis of the various cliches employed by many well-meaning Christians to uphold their brand of orthodoxy. This chapter seeks to awaken within every individual a correct understanding of the numerous rigid formulas in order to promote the unity for which Jesus prayed and to correctly identify the false prophets that He warned against.

Unity and Fellowship

Some leaders within the Churches of Christ do not make a distinction between *unity* and *fellowship*. According to some Christians, unity is founded upon fellowship of agreement, not unity created by the Holy Spirit. Many Christians advocate that the unity of the Spirit is as a result of fellowship with other believers in the same interpretative community,^[9] but this philosophy is not Biblical.^[10] Unity is that which the Holy Spirit creates, not man. It is the Spirit's unity. In fact, Paul writes, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:3). In other words, Paul says, "spare no effort." To what end? Not to produce a unity, not to create a unity, not to try to arrive at a unity, but to keep the unity. This unity is already in existence. It is unity of all those who believe and respond to the message of redemption expounded in chapters 1—3 of Ephesians. In other words, fellowship is a fruit of unity, not unity a fruit of fellowship. Carl Ketcherside is therefore right when he says,

The Spirit introduces all of the obedient believers into one body and thus forms an active fellowship of all who respond to the Good News. He does this without regard for nation or social distinctions. He generates a vital unity of all who are regenerated.^[12]

Unity and Conformity

Again, Christians must differentiate between *unity* and *conformity*. Within the Christian community, Christians have sought to base a superstructure of religion upon attainment to a certain degree of knowledge and wisdom. The traditional concept of unity is based upon conformity in knowledge and wisdom.^[13] But, it goes almost without saying that conformity in the absolute demands equal ability of perception, simultaneous arrival at perfection in knowledge, and universality of wisdom. Alexander Campbell drove home this point extremely well when he penned:

It is cruel to excommunicate a man because of the imbecility of his intellect. I have been censured long and often for laying too much stress upon the assent of the understanding; but those who have most acrimoniously censured me, have laid much more stress upon the assent of the mind than I have ever done. I never did, at any time exclude a man from the kingdom of God for a mere imbecility of intellect; or, in other words, because he could not assent to my opinions.^[14]

The unity for which Jesus prayed is not external organizational unity. This unity is the unity of persons. It is a fellowship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit with all those who believe. This means that the unity in the *ekklesia* of God involves this fellowship of being. When one is born again, born of the Spirit, or becomes a partaker of the divine nature, this person shares in this unity for which Jesus prayed. And so He calls everyone into the fellowship through the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). There can be no unity at all in our Lord's sense apart from the operation of the Holy Spirit who creates within every believer this new nature. Paul wrote: "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (1 Corinthians 12:13). Jürgen Moltmann once said with his typical pungency:

The unity of the congregation is a unity in freedom. It must not be confused with unanimity, let alone uniformity in perception, feeling or morals. No one must be regimented, or forced into conformity with conditions prevailing in the church. Everyone must be accepted with his gifts and tasks, his weaknesses and handicaps. This unity is an ^[15] evangelical unity, not a legal one.

Fellowship and Agreement

Another concept that divides many within the Churches of Christ is that some do not make a separation between the terms *fellowship* and *agreement*. In many camps, if there is no agreement, then there is no fellowship. Leaders and members throughout Churches of Christ are now realizing that fellowship does not come as a result of one's agreement upon matters of opinion and interpretation, but rather one's ability to reach agreement upon doctrinal issues comes as a result of fellowship. Christians are not one in opinion; they are one in Christ. One does not become a child of God through study, acquisition of knowledge, learning of the law, skill as teacher but through procreation not education. Ketcherside is quite correct in observing that

As God accepted us in our weakness, with mistaken ideas, warped views and unhealthful attitudes, so we must accept each other in the same state or condition. We must not make the kingdom of heaven to consist of our convictions, attitudes or opinions, but of citizens who must be tolerant of each other in such matters, else there can be no kingdom of heaven ^[16] at all.

Gospel and Doctrine

Next, one must discriminate between *gospel* and *doctrine*, a separation drawn by the writers of the New Testament. There is as much difference between the gospel of Christ and the apostolic doctrine as there is between the sperm from which a child is begotten and the food that he eats after he is born. Paul knew the difference between the seed from which life came and the daily bread upon which the children fed. He knew the difference between gospel and doctrine and between faith and knowledge. He knew that the gospel brought one into being while the doctrine was essential to

^[17] one's growth and well being; Paul did not make a test of fellowship out of spiritual digestion. Those who confuse chastisement of a child with begetting and cannot distinguish between correction ^[18] and conception are in a sad predicament.

Fellowship and Endorsement

Once more, one must distinguish between fellowship and endorsement, which is one of the major problems within the Churches of Christ. Many are under the impression that to have fellowship with one another is to endorse whatever the other person believes, which cannot be true. All Christians are in fellowship with God, but who is so foolish as to believe that God endorses everything a person believes or does? In Paul's letter to the Romans, he writes, "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters" (14:1). Again, "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (15:7). But still, someone may ask, "Are you in fellowship with error?" No, one is in fellowship with individuals. The question posed by many is: "Are you in fellowship with brothers in error?" One's response must be "yes," because that is the only kind of brothers and sisters one knows about. As Alexander Campbell has made clear:

So long as unity of opinion was regarded as a proper basis of religious union, so long have mankind been distracted by the multiplicity and variety of opinions. To establish what is called a system of orthodox opinions as the bond of union, was, in fact, offering a premium for new diversities in opinion, and for increasing, *ad infinitum*, opinions, sects, and divisions. . . . But the grandeur, sublimity, and beauty of the foundation of hope, and of ecclesiastical or social union, established by the author and founder of Christianity, consisted in this, that THE BELIEF OF ONE FACT, and that upon the best evidence in the world, is all that is requisite, as far as faith goes, to salvation. The belief of this ONE FACT, and submission to ONE INSTITUTION expressive of it, is all that is required of

^[19]
Heaven to admission into the church.

OBJECTIVES IN PROJECT/DISSERTATION

In the course of my project, it will be necessary to allocate a specific study to the appellation of false prophets as employed by Jesus in the Matthean narrative (7:15; 24:11, 24). This project is designed to teach leaders and members of the Churches of Christ how to determine who the false prophets are in the various texts in the Gospel of Matthew, and then to teach these truths to other members in their own congregations to bring about the unity for which our Lord prayed. As a preliminary to the major study on false prophets, some time will be spent (Chapter 3) discussing the basic rules of interpretation and how certain terms play a major role in how one reacts to others who are not in their accomplished campground.

Since all Christians are under a mandate to "Be imitators of God . . . and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:1-2), then it is imperative that everyone work toward making "every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (4:3). It is the objective of this project to teach leaders and members of the Churches of Christ to spell out the Word of God more completely and to increase one's skill in teaching others how to read the Scriptures more effectively. The highest mission in this dissertation is to encourage oneness among God's family. My hypothesis is that when Christians are taught how to read the Gospel of Matthew from a narrative viewpoint, then they will arrive at a correct understanding and identification of who the false prophets are in Matthew.

SETTING FOR PROJECT/DISSERTATION

The settings for this dissertation activity occurred within three congregations of the Churches of Christ: (1) Luverne Church of Christ, Luverne, AL.; (2) Landmark Church of Christ, Montgomery, AL.; and (3) Central Church of Christ, Montgomery, AL. The leaders and members in these three congregations, like all Christians, are in a state of growth and development in their rethinking many of the traditional views handed down by the forefathers within the Churches of Christ. A brief overview of the make-up of each congregation will help the reader to comprehend more fully the problems that Churches of Christ are facing in their efforts to restore the Biblical principles for unity set forth in the Scriptures.

Luverne Church of Christ

The Luverne congregation originated in 1900. Today, this body of believers averages approximately 150 in attendance on Sundays. The composition of the congregation is about 40 under age 25, about 60 between ages 25—55, and approximately 40 over age 60. The other Churches of Christ in this area consider this church to be a liberal fellowship. The minister, Kenny Payne, related to me that he regularly receives letters about his going to hell because of his willingness to question traditionalism. The Luverne congregation is made up of individuals who still hold to the more traditional views of the Churches of Christ and also people that are questioning the traditions handed down from the forefathers. Yet, in spite of this diversity there is still unity. This acceptance of one another is unity in diversity in action.

Landmark Church of Christ

The Landmark Church had its inception on February 27, 1972. In its beginning it was more traditional (five acts of worship performed in a prescribed manner) in its concept of Christianity. This congregation re-evaluated (1996) many of its traditional beliefs and made changes in harmony with its clearer understanding of the teachings of God. This church has approximately 700 in attendance on Sundays. As a result of its change from the more conservative stance to a more liberal attitude toward other Christians and the rethinking of its traditional Sunday morning worship service, this ^[20] congregation has come under fire from the Seibles Road Church of Christ. The spirit of freedom became the hallmark of this congregation, especially with the arrival of Buddy Bell on September 15, 1996. Shortly before the arrival of Buddy Bell, this church had begun to operate on the principle of unity in diversity.

Central Church of Christ

The Central Church of Christ had its beginning in March 1997. This congregation has approximately fifty members. The pulpit minister in this group, D. L. Calloway, is not the traditional Church of Christ minister. He, as well as others in this congregation, has questioned the “hand-me-down” explanations from the forefathers of the Churches of Christ. The Central Church is composed of a mixture of those with traditional beliefs as well as the more moderate thinkers. This congregation, like many others, is questioning and rethinking the more conventional stance. In this community there is also the philosophy of unity in diversity. Toleration for differences is the general tenor of this body of believers.

Objectives in Three Individual Four Hour Seminars

This project/dissertation revolves around three separate four-hour seminars designed to assist leaders and members within the Churches of Christ to become more adept in applying principles of

Biblical interpretation in order to determine who the false prophets are in the Gospel of Matthew. This study will examine carefully the three occurrences of false prophets in this Gospel. This project/dissertation should aid one in accurately applying the phrase “false prophets” to preserve the meaning intended by Jesus. The objective of this dissertation is to help Christians promote the unity of the Spirit. Hopefully, this examination will reveal that false prophets are not necessarily individuals who fall short in their ability to interpret properly the Scriptures.

This in-depth study should demonstrate that one is a false prophet who denies that Jesus is the Messiah, one who advances social status as measure of right standing before God, one who loves wealth, one who is self-righteous, one who is not concerned about justice and mercy, one who is evil,

^[21] and so on. These seminars will investigate Jesus’ words to the religious leaders to determine if ethical behavior had any bearing upon His castigation of them as false prophets. Finally, an analysis of the conflict passages will be done to judge the context for the “false prophets” quotations.

There were a number of assumptions made concerning individuals who participated in this training process. The first presupposition assumed that each person had a basic understanding of the Christian faith. The second also understood that each person would be willing to come together for a four-hour seminar. And the final assumption presupposed that there would be five to twelve members each from three different congregations. As a result of these three seminars, I was able to get equal representation among the members for evaluation as to the effectiveness of the seminar training in determining who the false prophets were in the Gospel of Matthew.

The first seminar was conducted with the Luverne Church of Christ on January 31, 1999; the second seminar occurred on February 1, 1999 with the Landmark Church of Christ; and the third seminar took place on February 6, 1999. In the first seminar there were eleven in attendance; in the second, there were five in attendance; and in the third, there were five in attendance. In the first seminar, only one leader participated, the others were lay members; the second seminar involved only leaders (elders); and the third involved both leaders (three preachers) and lay members.

I began each of the three seminars with preliminary remarks about the dissertation. Following the introduction, I had each person to fill out a pre-test to determine their understanding of false prophets prior to the discussion about false prophets in the Gospel of Matthew. Following the three to four hour seminars, I, then, had each participant to complete the post-test to determine if there had been any change in their thinking concerning false prophets in Matthew.

The discussion began with remarks about principles of interpretation. In this discussion, examples were given to illustrate the necessity of looking at the context in order to draw out of the Scriptures rather than reading into the Scriptures one’s own preconceived ideas. A number of handouts were presented to each participant, but we did not take time to read any of the essays. I briefly presented the overall views set forth in the various papers to illustrate principles that one should apply in analyzing the three passages in Matthew that speaks of false prophets.

The papers given to each participant included subjects dealing with the Passover and the Lord’s supper in Matthew 26, a brief overview of the one-cup and non-Sunday school movement, the doctrine of Christ in 2 John 9, the “judge not” passage in Matthew 7:1, the “narrow gate” Scripture in Matthew 7:15, and Burdette’s “Pilgrimage of Faith” that illustrates pitfalls to avoid in the interpretation of Scripture. These essays were written for this dissertation to illustrate the various strategies that Christians employ to justify their separation from other Christians on the basis that they are false prophets. But the essays were also written to teach individuals to be conscious of the basic principles of interpretation so that they will not misapply the “false prophets” passages to other Christians and continue to maintain division which violates the prayer of unity for which Jesus prayed as recorded in John 17.

Next, the three major divisions in Matthew were presented in order to help the participants to correlate the material in Matthew in order to grasp more fully the conflict in this Gospel. In discussing the larger sections, a considerable amount of time was given to the theme of the identity of Jesus

beginning with the first chapter through the last chapter. Following this presentation, all the conflict passages in Matthew's Gospel were analyzed.

MAJOR COMPONENTS OF DISSERTATION

This dissertation consists of seven chapters. The following is a brief summary of the contents of each chapter beginning with Chapter 2:

The second major component (Chapter 2) of this dissertation scrutinizes the present emergency that exists within the Churches of Christ with regards to identification of false prophets within the Churches of Christ. This chapter discusses the nation-wide divisions as well as the local division within the Churches of Christ within the city of Montgomery, AL as well as one congregation within a fifty-mile radius of Montgomery.

The third phase (Chapter 3) of this dissertation explores basic principles of how to apply essential standards of careful Biblical exposition in order to arrive at a legitimate outlook as to whom Matthew identifies as erroneous instructors in his Gospel. This chapter seeks to set forth principles of interpretation in order to understand more clearly who the false prophets are in Matthew's Gospel.

The fourth stage of this dissertation (Chapter 4) investigates the structure of the book of Matthew in order to ascertain the proper identification of false prophets in this Gospel. This chapter analyzes the three major divisions within Matthew's Gospel in order to understand more fully the conflict that is revealed between Jesus and the religious leaders.

Chapter 5 sets forth a canvass of the "hostility" texts in the Gospel of Matthew (vertical) in order to understand more fully the warning of Jesus about false prophets. In the course of this examination of conflict in Matthew's Gospel, it will be necessary to look at the direct and indirect confrontation of the religious leaders with Jesus to understand adequately and clearly why Jesus warned the disciples about false prophets.

Chapter 6 describes in detail the project conducted. This part of the dissertation will discuss the congregations in their present settings, the make-up of those present for the seminars, their reactions to the materials presented, and the papers dispensed for further study in seeking a solution to the many problems facing those within the Churches of Christ

Chapter 7 assesses the pre-test and post-test given to the participants to judge any difference in their thinking before and after the seminar. The pre-test and post-test set forth nineteen statements about false prophets. The statements center on current beliefs that are causing problems within the Churches of Christ. The objective of these tests is to determine if there are any significant changes in the participants' thinking about who the false prophets are in the Gospel of Matthew at the end of each of the four-hour seminars.

CONCLUSION

My emphasis in this chapter has called attention to the unity of the Spirit that all Christians are to strive to uphold. Since Christians are to preserve this unity in all good consciousness, then a number of cliches were analyzed to help clear away the underbrush or cobwebs in their thinking so that they do not violate their beliefs. This chapter sought to assist individuals in eradicating fuzzy understanding in order to bring about an answer to Christ's priestly prayer for unity (John 17).

This chapter explored the utter impossibility of making absolute perfection in knowledge the condition of salvation and fellowship. Since many Christians within the Churches of Christ advance unblemished perfection in knowledge of one's party beliefs before they can extend the right hand of fellowship, Paul was called upon to see if this philosophy is what he taught before he extended

friendly intercourse to other devoted saints. To refute faultlessness in knowledge as a prerequisite for association, this chapter looked at two congregations (Corinth and Rome) in which differences existed in order to determine from a Biblical perspective the mind-set to be exercised by Christians in similar circumstances today. In spite of disagreements within these two fellowships, Paul called for forbearance, not ostracism.

The subsequent chapter looks at the confusion that presently exists within the Churches of Christ that is splintering the body of Christ into numerous warring parties. Chapter 2 demonstrates that the term false prophet is indiscriminately hurled at other saints who do not agree with the one who thinks he has complete understanding.

This chapter is not designed to question the sincerity of those that disagree with the findings of this project/dissertation, for these individuals, too, are seeking to be true to the Word of God. But rather it is to encourage individuals to become peacemakers, not piecemakers. In other words, Christians are to promote peace and harmony, not to fracture the body of Christ into warring factions.

^[1] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 65.

^[2] All Scripture citations are from the NIV, unless stated otherwise.

^[3] See Thomas Campbell, “Declaration and Address,” in C. A. Young, *Historical Documents Advocating Christian Union* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, reprint, 1985, 107, 108 where he writes in Proposition One: “That the Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one; consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the Scriptures, and that manifest the same by their tempers and conduct, and of none else; as none else can be truly and properly called Christians.”

^[4] For an example of this mind-set, see Jerry Dickinson, “Unity in Diversity,” *Old Paths Advocate* LXVII, no. 8 (August 1995): 1, 8-9. The one-cup, non-Sunday school, grape juice only, bread pinchers, and so on, publish this particular journal. See also Don L. King, “Proper Perspective,” *Old Paths Advocate* LXVII, no. 9 (September 1995):2, 7. Billy D. Dickinson writes another insightful article that discloses the inner feelings of this peculiar fellowship, “False Teachers and Fellowship, *Old Paths Advocate* LXVIII, no. 10 (October 1995): 1, 9.

^[5] See J. E. Choate, “The Baby Boomers and Unity in Diversity,” *Firm Foundation* 108, no. 8 (August 1993): 18-20.

^[6] See Chapter 2, “The Crisis and Identification of False Prophets Within the Churches of Christ” for documentation to validate this distinctive use of Matthew 7:15 within the Churches of Christ.

^[7] See Chapter 4, “Narrative Overview of the Gospel of Matthew” for the advantages of narrative application in seeking to understand the individual texts such as Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24.

^[8] In order to ascertain the meaning that is attached to any word or phrase, one must examine the context. The word “context” is from Latin, which means to “weave together” and is applied to written documents. The context is the connection of thought that runs through every passage, which constitutes for itself a whole. The immediate context is that which immediately precedes or follows a given word, phrase, or sentence. Not only must the context be considered, but one must also investigate the scope and plan of the author.

^[9] Interpretative communities are composed of members who share a particular reading “strategy,” or a “set of community assumption.” See M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 6th ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993), 271. See also Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980). I have chosen to use “interpretative community” rather than “interpretive community” as employed by Fish.

[10]

For a fuller explanation of these terms, see Dallas Burdette, “The ‘Is’ and ‘Is Not’ of Fellowship, *Restoration Review* 15, no. 10 (December 1973): 194-196.

[11]

See Dallas Burdette, “The Spirit Makes Us One,” *Restoration Review* 16, no. 4 (April 1974): 276-277.

[12]

Carl Ketcherside, “The Spirit and Unity,” *Mission Messenger* 25, no. 2 (July 1963): 3 [99]. To access all of the issues of *Mission Messenger* [On-Line], go to: www.unity-in-diversity.org

[13]

For an insightful article on unity, see Leroy Garrett, “Unity is God’s Gift,” *Restoration Review* 15, no. 8 (October 1973): 150-152. See also Carl Ketcherside, “The Spirit and Unity,” *Mission Messenger* 25, no. 7 (July 1963): 1-16.

[14]

Alexander Campbell, “Millennium—No. II,” *Millennial Harbinger* 1, no. 4 (Monday, April 5, 1830): 13, 14.

[15]

Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), 343.

[16]

Carl Ketcherside, “Contrary to Doctrine,” *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 3 (March 1965): 4.

[17]

See Dallas Burdette, “Restoring the Biblical Ideal of Preaching” in *Restoration Forum VIII* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1990), 147-155.

[18]

See Carl Ketcherside, “Gospel and Doctrine,” *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 2 (February 1965): 1-11. I am indebted to Ketcherside for assisting me in a clearer understanding of the distinction between gospel and doctrine.

[19]

Alexander Campbell, “The Foundation of Hope and of Christian Union,” *The Christian Baptist* 1, no. 9 (April 5, 1824): 176, 177.

[20]

Chapter 2 deals with this conflict between Landmark Church of Christ and the Seibles Road Church of Christ

[21]

Chapter 5 will explore the various character traits employed by Jesus to characterize the sick state of being of the religious leaders called false prophets.

CHAPTER 2

THE CRISIS AND IDENTIFICATION OF FALSE PROPHETS WITHIN THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST

One of the main principles of the Protestant Reformation was that of *sola Scriptura*—the sole authority of Scripture in questions of faith. The Reformers themselves did not agree on the scope and application of that principle. Some, like Luther, meant by it that anything which was contrary to the clear words of Scripture should be rejected, while traditions that did not contradict the Bible could—and normally should—be retained. Zwingli and others went much farther and sought to do away with anything that was not clearly supported by Scripture. But in spite of these differences, all agreed that the reason why the Reformation was needed was that, to a greater or lesser degree, the tradition of the church made it difficult, if not impossible to read the Bible correctly.^[1]

PRESENT CRISIS WITHIN THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST

Tradition is still making it difficult for Christians to read the Bible correctly. As a result of the foothold that custom has within many Churches of Christ, the churches as a whole are hopelessly divided over opinions. These divisions are deep and wide. Issues are so hotly debated that for one to disagree with the status quo of a particular group is to call down upon his/her head the epithet—false teacher.^[2] The lines of demarcation are tearing this denomination^[3] into many warring factions. The heart of all the confusion is over pattern theology, which focuses on the methodology of how to conduct a worship service on Sunday morning with its five-acts. Each group basically has its own agenda.^[3] This chapter is a brief summary of the conflict within the Churches of Christ in its identification of false prophets in Matthew's Gospel.

Country-wide Dissension

The Churches of Christ today are experiencing change that is causing some churches to level the harmful charge of false prophets against those who turn aside from long defended cherished traditions (traditionalism). Again, as in the Reformation, one's heritage has made it difficult to interpret the written word accurately. Traditions are often equated with the Word of God itself. Leroy Garrett points out that

People tire of our equating *our* understanding of the word of God with the word of God itself. This is to say that we must distinguish between revelation and interpretation. Revelation is what God has given us in scripture. Interpretation is what we conclude the scriptures to mean. One is divine, the other human.^[4]

Many Christians can no longer distinguish between the interpretation of the interpretative community and the Word of God itself. It is in this vein of orthodoxy that Stafford North, associated with Oklahoma Christian University of Science and Arts, forewarns against change, but this, too, is based upon his own interpretative community.^[5] North points out in defense of his position that “Paul,

John, Jesus and others in the New Testament forbid anyone to change or vary from this teaching. Jesus warned of false teachers and spoke of those in judgment who thought they were His but would be turned away because he ‘never knew them’ (Matthew 7:15-20).^[6]

North cites many Scriptures to justify his negative position of turnabout within the Churches of Christ. But upon closer analysis of the Scriptures he cites, the evidence does not appear to support his judgment of indictment. No one denies the Scriptures he relies upon to teach that one should not depart from the teachings of Jesus, but rather many Evangelical believers reject his application of those Scriptures to maintain the status quo within his interpretative community.

Each interpretative community advances its own brand of orthodoxy. There are approximately twenty-five divisions within the Churches of Christ, each one postulating its own trademark of conformity. The history of the Churches of Christ is riddled with conflict and division over peripheral issues. It is in this same vein of disharmony within the Churches of Christ that Richard H. Niebuhr addresses the subject of hostility within Christendom itself. He is correct when he pungently captures the very essence of exclusiveness through teaching the history of the church.

The teaching of church history is sometimes made the occasion for developing a sense of alienation from other groups rather than for developing a sense of unity. Like every other history, it is used at times to promote indoctrination in a peculiar tenet. Yet fundamentally and generally it is taught as church history.^[7]

This alienation reached a climax for some within the Churches of Christ in the 1960s. In 1966, for instance, seventeen men and women voiced their concern for change within the Churches of Christ.^[8] The concern of these Christians shook the establishment and reverberated throughout the Churches of Christ with fear of the unknown.^[9] Many were coming out of Plato’s cave. They were no longer seeing shadows, but they were seeing reality. Robert Myers in analyzing the tension build-up writes in his “Introduction” the following scenario that describes the purpose of the book:

Some of us within the Church of Christ segment of the Restoration movement, and some recently out of it, have felt it imperative to analyze its failures. This anthology of essays is a criticism of a religious way of life. It is written by men who have remained within the Church of Christ, or by those who have felt they had to seek wider fellowship but still love dearly the people they left behind.^[10]

Since the publication of *Voices of Concern*, many leaders have repudiated the narrow-mindedness within many Churches of Christ. And, as a result of rethinking ritualistic worship positions (five acts) once held, many are now advancing the concept that God has not ordained a ritualistic worship service with five acts and also that God has a larger fellowship than just those within the Churches of Christ.^[11] Thus, crises exist within the churches, and this call for change is working havoc among those who seek to stifle variation in the so-called worship service. But for those seeking more freedom in their gatherings, they often suffer ostracism by other Christians.^[12] Neal Pryor, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Professor of Bible at Harding University, is correct when he writes: “There is hardly a congregation in our brotherhood that is not feeling the pressure for change. This trend can be a great benefit in that it calls us to re-examine what is really essential for us to keep and what are traditions that can and perhaps should be changed.”^[13]

Curtis Cates, Director of the Memphis School of Preaching and co-editor of *Yokefellow*, laments the fact that many within the Churches of Christ are no longer “set courageously for the defense of the Truth.”^[14] Again, he says, “Liberalism is an enemy of the light of God’s Word, the absolute and knowable Truth (2 Tim. 3:14-17).”^[15] He then identifies two men (Rubel Shelly and Randy Harris) within the Churches of Christ as associated with “the liberal, modernistic human philosophies”^[16] These two men published a book to call attention to many of the traditions within the Churches of Christ that Christians should no longer adhere to.^[17] Cates complains that “Brethren Harris and Shelly propose to give us ‘a theology for the 21st century church’ (p. xiii); they will ‘reexamine the foundation’ (p. xiv).”^[18] Once more, he calls attention to the urgency of stopping “The mouths of false witnesses.”^[19] He believes that these two men are attacking the truth.^[20] He then relies upon 2 John 9—11 to justify separation and ostracism from these two men.^[21]

Two years after the publication of the above book, Cates wrote another book in which he refers to Shelly by citing the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:15: “Jesus warned, ‘Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves. By their fruits ye shall know them’ (Mat. 7:15-16).”^[22] In 1990, C. Leonard Allen published a book^[23] that also caused him to come under “fire” from Cates as a false prophet. Cates accuses Allen of disrespect for the Word and also charges him with treating the Word as “unrealistic” and “fairy tale-like”:

In other words, what brethren did was fairy tale-like and unrealistic; one cannot know what Truth is, and to think he can is to merely dream. Is that what Christ commanded when He said, “Beware of false prophets...” (Mat. 7:15), or when He warned, “But in vain do they worship me, Teaching [sic] as their doctrines the precepts of men” (Mat. 15:9), or “Let them [false teachers and their religions] alone: they are blind guides” (Mat. 15:14), or what Paul meant when he charged, “. . . to whom we gave place in the way of subjection, no, not for an hour” (Gal. 2:5).^[24]

In 1996, Jim Waldron, another patternist, wrote an article in which he, too, took to task the theology of Shelly and Harris. He, too, bemoans the fact that the teachings of Shelly and Harris have infiltrated the mission fields.^[25] He further castigates these men by citing articles by Choate,^[26] also patternistic in his theology, in which he says,

He is also demonstrating how false teachers in this generation are seeking to do the same thing in some of our schools. Also, the *Firm Foundation* has over the last five years documented much of the current digressive movement coming out of Abilene Christian University.^[27]

This present crisis within the Churches of Christ involves the concept of pattern theology. Pattern theology, as stated above, is the belief that God has ordained a prescribed ritual to be performed on Sunday morning in a prescribed manner in order for there to be “worship in Spirit and truth.” Waldron calls attention to ten men that do not advance the so-called five acts of worship, also known as pattern theology. Waldron, as he cites Choate, states the matter firmly:

Brother Goebel Music in 1991 published *Behold The Pattern*, in which he meticulously documented the uncertain sounds of ten preachers and/or college professors. These men are: Max Lucado, San Antonio, Texas; Stephen Taylor, former professor of Abilene Christian University, who is now in England; Larry James, Plano, Texas; Rick Atchley, Fort Worth, Texas; Randy Fenter, San Antonio, Texas; Jim Hackney, Fort Worth, Texas; Jeff Walling, Mission Viejo, Calif.; Randy Mayeux, Dallas, Texas; Rubel Shelly, Nashville, Tenn.; and Denny Boultinghouse, West Monroe, La. ^[28]

Just a perusal of the books and religious journals reveals the prevailing crisis that crystallizes around this expression (five acts): For example, Garland Elkins, Dean of Public Relations in the Memphis School of Preaching, asserts:

There is a true worship. Jesus said, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Without hesitation, we affirm that worship to God under the New Testament consists of preaching (Acts 20:7), the Lord’s supper (Acts 20:7), singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), praying (Acts 2:42), and the giving of our means (1 Cor. 16:1-2). These five acts are the only authorized acts of worship to God. ^[29]

LOCAL DISSENSION IN MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA

The Churches of Christ in Montgomery, AL are experiencing turmoil in unparalleled consequences—disunity. The Seibels Road Church of Christ in Montgomery, AL publishes a bulletin weekly to call attention to apostasy—defection as defined by the Seibels Road Church of Christ ^[30] “interpretative community.” This bulletin prints articles by various authors to call attention to those who are so-called false prophets within the Churches of Christ.

The minister, O. B. Porterfield of the Seibels Road Church of Christ republished, in his November 3, 1996 bulletin an article written (originally written on September 25, 1996) by Ray Dutton, a former member of the Landmark Church of Christ. The Dutton article is prefaced with some remarks by O. B. Porterfield in which he reminds his readers that in May 1994 that he wrote about Buddy Bell, and Joe Beam’s appearance on Faulkner University’s “Focus.” His Preface is titled: “Buddy Bell Returns to Montgomery.” ^[31] In this “Preface,” he expresses sorrow that his efforts were futile. He could not prevent these two men from appearing on Faulkner University’s lectureship.

In the third paragraph of Dutton’s letter to the elders of the Landmark Church of Christ, he says, “Recently, I became very upset about the scheduling of a known false teacher to speak to our young people.” ^[32] Dutton continues in this letter to speak of Bell’s association with other known false teachers: “Though I was well aware that Buddy had a reputation for keeping company with a number of known false teachers, I had hoped that he was personally committed to the truth of God.” ^[33] He then cites Matthew 7:15 in warning the family at Landmark about Buddy Bell now minister of the Landmark congregation. He writes of the danger of the souls at the Landmark Church of Christ.

I would give up my family at Landmark and never return if that alone would save the many precious souls here who are now gravely in danger from a man I now believe is a false

teacher “secretly brought in” (Gal. 2:4), who has come to God’s flock in “sheep’s clothing” (Mt. 7:15) but is in truth a “ravenous wolf.”^[34]

Matthew 7:15 is cited by Dutton as applicable to Bell. Dutton relates a series of questions that he presented to Bell in order to elicit from him his feelings about “(1) ‘BAPTISM,’ (2) ‘INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC and DENOMINATIONALISM,’ (3) ‘SOLOS, CHOIRS, QUARTETS AND OTHER SPECIAL MUSIC,’ (4) ‘THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH,’ (5) ‘HONESTY WITH THE BRETHREN,’ AND (6) ‘FELLOWSHIP WITH THE DENOMINATIONS.’”^[35] As a result of this encounter, Dutton then cites Titus 3:10 and combines this Scripture with 2 John 9—11 to justify his characterization of Bell as a false teacher.

Joe Beam, another minister who calls for reflection upon traditionalism, came under attack again by Jerry C. Brewer. Brewer cited Romans 16:17-18, 2 John 9—11, and Ephesians 5:11 to uphold his belief that Beam is a false teacher.^[36] Another Montgomery minister, Philip Black, minister for the Carriage Hills Church of Christ, also received a reprimand from Porterfield^[37] and, at the same time, he also received the epithet of false teacher from Armond Hoover. Hoover expresses his concern over Black’s influence within the Churches of Christ and then labels him as a false teacher.

Your shallowness is showing, Brother Black. Brother O. B. and all other knowledgeable and understanding Christians know that only God can and will condemn the disobedient to His Will. However the righteous and obedient are commanded to (and will) warn and mark all false teachers and the disobedient (Rom. 16:17-18), beware of false prophets in sheep’s clothing (Matt. 7:15-16) (or be aware – A.H.). A warning, Grievous wolves (false teachers—A. H.) will enter among us, not sparing the flock, even our own selves to draw away (deceive – A.H.) disciples after them (Acts 20:29-30).^[38]

The third Church of Christ to come under attack in Montgomery, AL was the Vaughn Park Church of Christ. Mark Smith at the time of the attack was the pulpit minister for this congregation.^[40]

On July 13, 1997, Porterfield lashed out against all three congregations (Landmark, Carriage Hills, and Vaughn Park) for their participation in a lectureship called “Jubilee.” He wrote: “BUDDY BELL, minister at Landmark, and PHILIP BLACK, minister at the F.O.G (Carriage Hills), were on the program and Vaughn Park advertised and encouraged people to attend this gathering of heretics.”^[41] In another bitter article, Porterfield cited Matthew 7:15 as applicable to Mark Smith: “We proved his error by the scriptures. Matt. 7:1-5 condemns harsh judgment, but a judgment must be made according to Matt. 7:15-16. John 7:24 command [sic] righteous judgement according to the Word of God, Psa. 119:172.”^[42]

These citations from the *Seibles Road Church of Christ* bulletin illustrate the crises that presently exist in the city of Montgomery, AL. I have reviewed the issues of this bulletin for the last two years, and almost without exception every page of this paper summons the same Scriptures to justify separation from those who do not explain the Word of God as it is presently interpreted by this particular “interpretative community,” namely, the Seibles Road Church of Christ. This brief review of the contemporary situation of division within the Churches of Christ in Montgomery calls for a reexamination of how to interpret and understand Scripture in light of its context.

CONCLUSION

This chapter examined the controversy within the Churches of Christ as to who is or who is not a false prophet. Journals and books were called forth to illustrate the confusion that exists among so many devout Christians. It was observed that Christians often tag other Christians as misleading teachers when anyone dares to go against the grain of the intelligence of the religious leaders in certain “interpretative communities.” Every Christian is confronted with the question: Is deformity in comprehension in and of itself sufficient grounds for the epithet of false prophet? One must determine who is and who is not a counterfeit teacher from Scripture, not tradition.

The question is, Is one a sham teacher simply because one believes in instrumental music, handclapping in the assembly, solo singing, Sunday schools, individual communion cups, orphan homes, Bible colleges, and so on? Since Jesus warns against imitation prophets (Matthew 7:15, 24:11,24), then believers do have a responsibility to identify those who come under this classification. One must recognize a false teacher through a correct application of Scripture, not through the traditions of men. The Word of God alone is the criterion that can assist one in making this determination.

The perusals of the various Church of Christ journals revealed that certain Scriptures were relied upon to justify separation from other believers. Two Scriptures cited were 2 John 9^[43] and Matthew 7:15. Many writers to uphold their practice of ostracism cited these verses.

Chapter 3 will analyze certain interpretative principles to assist one in handling the false prophets’ passages more accurately. This chapter will also look at the structure of Matthew’s gospel built around five major discourses. This analysis, along with Matthew’s date of writing, should aid one in arriving at a correct application as to whom Jesus and Matthew are referring in their warning individuals about false prophets. This chapter will also stress the principle of analyzing the whole before analyzing the particulars especially in the case of Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24.

[1]

Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), 29.

[2]

Some within the Churches of Christ deny that this movement is a denomination. For an admission that the Church of Christ is a denomination, see a comment by Alexander Campbell, one of the originators of the Stone/Campbell Movement, he wrote, as early as 1840, to a Baptist scholar, Andrew Broaddus, whom he called brother, about his concern over the written history of the Reformation Movement:

Whenever the history of this effort at reformation shall have been faithfully written, it will appear, we think, bright as the sun, that our career has been marked with a spirit of forbearance, moderation, and love of union with an unequivocal desire for preserving the integrity, harmony, and co-operation of all who teach one faith, one Lord, and one immersion. In confirmation of this fact I am happy to add that no Baptist of good character for piety and morality, has ever been, because of a diverse theory or opinion, excluded from our communion or communities. . . . We, as a *denomination*, are as desirous as ever to unite and co-operate with all Christians on the broad and vital principles of the New and everlasting Covenant. Alexander Campbell, “The Editor’s Response to Mr. Broaddus,” *Millennial Harbinger*, New Series, 4, no. XII (December 1840): 556.

[3]

To illustrate, for example, the confusion that exists within one of the major divisions within the Churches of Christ—the one-cup and non-Sunday school church—see Dallas Burdette, “A Brief History of the One-Cup and Non-Sunday School Movement” [ONLINE]. Available from <http://www.freedominchrist.net> [accessed 20 January 1999], located under caption **BIBLICAL STUDIES** and, then under the subheading **LORD’S SUPPER**. See also Appendix IV in this dissertation for a copy of this essay. This essay details the many oddities advanced by the many divisions within

this one-cup and non-Sunday school movement. Pattern theology is what the divisions are mainly fought over. The question for many is: What is the divine pattern for the five-acts?

[4] Leroy Garrett, "It Means What It Says," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 4 (April 1975): 69.

[5] For an interpretation of the "interpretative community," see Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), 171, where he says,

Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. In other words, these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around. . . . The first community will accuse the members of the second of being reductive, and they in turn will call their accusers superficial. The assumption in each community will be that the other is not correctly perceiving the "true text," but the truth will be that each perceives the text (or texts) its interpretive strategies demand and call into being.

[6] Stafford North, "How To Be Undenominational In A Denominational World," in Jim Sheerer and Charles L. Williams, eds., *Directions for the Road Ahead: Stability in Change Among Churches of Christ* (Chickasha, Oklahoma: Yeomen Press, 1998), 207.

[7] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 15.

[8] Robert Meyers, ed., *Voices of Concern* (Saint Louis, Missouri: Mission Messenger, 1966).

[9] Plato, "The Simile of the Cave," in *Plato: The Republic*, translated with an Introduction by Desmond Lee (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 255-264; see also David Melling, *Understanding Plato* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 97-113.

[10] Myers, *Voices of Concern*, 1.

[11] For an excellent discussion of the so-called five acts of worship between Buff Scott and Gary Workman, see Buff Scott Jr., "Acts of Worship," *The Reformer* 9, no. 5 (Sept-Oct 1993): 3-7. See also Mike Root, *Split Grape Juice: Rethinking the Worship Tradition* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1992); Mike Root, *UnBroken Bread: Healing Worship, Wounds* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1997).

[12] See, for example, Don L. King, " Proper Perspective," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVII, no. 9 (September 1995): 2, where he expresses his rejection of those who do not conform to his interpretative community's stance on one-cup and non-Sunday school beliefs.

Why do we worship with one cup? Answer: because we read it plainly in Matthew 26:27; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17-20; 1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:25-28. Is it wrong, sinful, to use more than one? Answer: yes, because more than one cup violates the examples given in these verses, it violates the command for us to do as Jesus did, "this do ye...." (1 Corinthians 11:25), etc., etc. Listen brethren: we believe it is wrong to use more than one cup. We believe people are going to be lost for using more than one cup. Surely, we believe that! If people are not going to be lost for using more than one, then let's give up the fight and heal the division caused by those who have insisted on using more than one. If it is wrong to use more than one cup in the Lord's Supper I can't worship with those who use more than one. If I can't worship with them I can't fellowship them and I can't fellowship you if you do! Is that simple? [sic].

[13] Neale T. Pryor, "The Essentials of the Faith: What Cannot Change," in *Church Unity: Stability & Flexibility in the Church*, 1995 Preacher's Forum, Harding University, Graduate School of Religion, ed. Donald Kinder (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1995), 33.

[14] Curtis Cates, *The Second Incarnation: A Pattern for Apostasy* (Memphis, Tennessee: Cates Publication, 1992), 18.

[15] Ibid., 19.

[16] Ibid.

[17] See Rubel Shelly and Randall J. Harris, *The Second Incarnation: A Theology for the 21st Century Church* (West Monroe, Louisiana: Howard Publishing Co., 1992).

[18] Cates, *Incarnation*, 20.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., 25-27. For an examination of this much-debated Scripture, see Dallas Burdette, “Doctrine of Christ in 2 John 9: Subjective or Objective Genitive?” [ONLINE]. Available from <http://www.freedominchrist.net> [accessed 20 January 1999] located under caption **Biblical Studies** and, then, under the subheading **Exegesis of Misapplied Scriptures**; see also Appendix V for this study on 2 John 9. For an excellent and detailed study on 2 John 9, see also Carl Ketcherside, “Receive Him Not,” *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 6 (June 1965): 81-90.

[22] Curtis Cates, *The “Core/Bull’s Eye Gospel” Concept Refuted: Shall We Have a New “Cultural Church”?* (Memphis, Tennessee: Cates Publication, 1994), 15. .

[23] C. Leonard Allen, *The Cruciform Church: Becoming a Cross-Shaped People in a Secular World* (Texas:Abilene Christian University Press, 1990).

[24] Cates, *Concept Refuted*, 38, 39.

[25] Jim Waldron, “False Teaching Comes to Mission Field,” *Firm Foundation* 111, no. 9 (September 1996): 13.

[26] For an example of the five-acts of worship by Choate, see J. C. Choate, *Gospel Sermonettes* (Winona, MS: J. C. Choate Publications, 1993) , 102-104.

[27] Waldron, “False Teaching Comes to Mission Field,” *Firm Foundation*, 13. For additional reading in this same vein, see Jim Laws, Lectureship director, *The Restoration: The Winds of Change*, Eighteenth Annual Spiritual Sword Lectureship [October 17-21, 1993] (Memphis, TN: Getwell Church of Christ, 1993); Dave Miller, *Piloting the Strait: A Guidebook for Assessing Change in Churches of Christ* (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1996); and William Woodson, *Change Agents and Churches of Christ: A Study In Contemporary problems With Change Agents Among Churches of Christ* (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1994).

[28] Ibid. For a detailed study and approval of this concept of pattern theology (five acts), see Goebel Music, *Behold the Pattern* (Colleyville, Texas: Goebel Music Publication, 1991), 393-394. See also Cates, *Incarnation*, 27-28.

[29] Garland Elkins, “Foreword,” in Cates, *Concept Refuted*, 12-13.

[30] This bulletin may be obtained from Seibles Road Church of Christ, 541 Seibles Rd., Montgomery, AL.

[\[31\]](#) O. B. Porterfield, “Buddy Bell Returns to Montgomery,” *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (November 3, 1996): 1.

[\[32\]](#) Ray Dutton, “To: The Elders of the Landmark church of Christ,” *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (November 3, 1996): 1.

[\[33\]](#) Ibid.

[\[34\]](#) Ibid., 2.

[\[35\]](#) Ibid., 3.

[\[36\]](#) Joe Beam was a former pulpit minister for the Carriage Hills Church of Christ—now called Family of God (F.O.G.)—in the city of Montgomery, AL.

[\[37\]](#) Jerry C. Brewer, “Oklahoma Brethren Issue Warning That Is On The ‘Beam,’” *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (February 2, 1997): 2.

[\[38\]](#) O. B. Porterfield, “A Reader Responds And Speaks Out!,” *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (January 19, 1997): 1.

[\[39\]](#) Armond Hoover, “Dear Philip Black,” Ibid., 2. This article also criticizes unity in diversity and recommends Goebel Music’s book, *Behold the Pattern* (Colleyville, TX: Goebel Music Publications, 1991). For a counter position of Hoover’s negative statements about unity in diversity, see Carl Ketcherside, “The Spirit and Unity,” *Mission Messenger* 25, no. 7 (July 1963): 97-112 [1-16].

[\[40\]](#) See David Hester, “OFF THE MARK,” *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (May 18, 1997): 1 for his castigation of Mark Smith as a false teacher as well as a host of others labeled as false teachers.

[\[41\]](#) This commentary (comments) by Porterfield is written in support of an article written by Robert Dodson, “The Move to Unite With Denominationalists,” *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (July 13, 1997): 2.

[\[42\]](#) These comments are in response to an article written by Clifton D. Kelly, “Worrying Too Much About Error? *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (December 21, 1997): 2. See also Appendix VIII, Dallas Burdette, “Judge Not,” for an examination of this much-abused text (Matthew 7:1).

[\[43\]](#) See Appendix V—Dallas Burdette, “Doctrine of Christ in 2 John 9: Subjective or Objective Genitive?—for an example of context interpretation. For an opposing view, see C. A. Smith, “Special Music,” *Old Paths Advocate* LXV, no. 3 (March 1996): 4-5; Mike McDanie, “The Right Hand of Fellowship,” part 2, *The Light* 27, no. 1 (January 1996): 3-6; Carl Johnson, “The Trojan Horse in the Church,” *Old Paths Advocate* LXV, no. 2 (February 1996): 1, 7-8; James Meadows, “Does the New Testament Represent a Pattern to Follow?” *Firm Foundation* 110, no. 12 (December 1995): 8-10; Stan Cox, “Is Sincerity Sometimes Enough?” *Guardian of Truth* XXXIX, no. 8 (April 20, 1995): 21-22; Tom M. Roberts, “Romans 14: Satan’s Trojan Horse for Fellowship with Error,” *Guardian of Truth* XXXIX, no. 4 (February 16, 1995): 110-113 [12-17]; Don Walker, “Second John 9 in Light of Context,” *The Restorer* (May/June 1989): 11-14; Jerry Moffitt, “Why I Don’t Have Fellowship With Denominational ‘Pastors’ and Catholic Priests,” *Contending for the Faith* XXVI, no. 8 (August 1995): 1, 3-6; William Woodson, “The Doctrine of Christ,” *The Spiritual Sword* 22, no. 3 (April 1991): 35-38; Roy Deaver, “Who ‘Splits the Log’?” *The Spiritual Sword* 15, no. 1 (October 1983): 11-13; Garland Elkins, “‘Receive Him Not’—II John 9-11,” *The Spiritual Sword* 5, no. 2 (January 1974): 31-34.

CHAPTER 3

PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION APPLIED TO AN INTERPRETATION OF FALSE PROPHETS IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Like any growth, development may be healthy or it may be malignant; discerning the difference between these two kinds of growth requires constant research into the pathology of traditions. But it is healthy development that keeps a tradition both out of the cancer ward and out of the fossil museum.^[11]

In the nineteenth century, Friedrich Schleiermacher originated the idea of the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle philosophy simply means: “Each part of a text must be interpreted with reference to the whole; yet the meaning of the whole cannot be grasped without considering the parts.”^[2] Interpretation is an attempt to understand the work as a whole by an analysis of its elements.^[3]

Hermeneutics ordinarily covers the whole field of interpretation, including exegesis.^[4] Nevertheless, hermeneutics is often used in a much narrower sense to grasp the relevance of ancient works. In other words, it is concerned about the “here” and “now.”^[5] L. Berkhof makes the following succinct observation:

The *necessity* of the study of hermeneutics follows from several considerations:

- (1) Sin darkened the understanding of man, and still exercises a pernicious influence on his conscious mental life. Therefore, special efforts must be made to guard against error.
- (2) Men differ from one another in many ways that naturally cause them to drift apart mentally. They differ, for instance,
 - (a) in intellectual capacity, aesthetic taste, and moral quality resulting in a lack of spiritual affinity:
 - (b) in intellectual attainment, some being educated, and others uneducated; and
 - (c) in nationality, with a corresponding difference in language, forms of thought,
^[6] customs, and morals.

Hayes and Holiday define exegesis as an attempt “to reach an informed understanding of the text.”^[8] It is possible for an interpreter to miss the point of the text if he or she does not consider the “linguistic, cultural, and historical background to the inspired writings,” writes Cedric Johnson.^[9] It is also in this vein that Berkhof cautions Christians not to fall into the same trap that many fell into during the Reformation. Berkhof again sharpens the focus of caution:

The militant spirit of the age found expression in hundreds of polemical writings. Each one sought to defend his own opinion with an appeal to Scripture. *Exegesis became the*

handmaid of dogmatics, and degenerated into a mere search for proof-texts. The Scriptures were studied in order to find there the truths that were embodied in the ^[10] Confessions.

To set the tone for this chapter, perhaps it would be helpful to review the experiences of numerous individuals within the Stone/Campbell Restoration Movement. Many within this Movement encounter long-held traditions in his/her quest to understand the Word of God in its ^[11] context. It is not uncommon for Christians to identify the traditions of their “interpretative community” with the Word itself. Johnson expresses the basic problem well in his discussion of presuppositions:

Generations of scholars in the field of hermeneutics have recognized the influence of preunderstanding on interpretation. C. S. Lewis observed that “what we learn from ^[12] experience depends on the kind of philosophy we bring to experience.”

Untold numbers with whom I have discussed the science of exposition have shared their frustrations and have described their Christian journeys as “Gullible’s Travels.” ^[13] Christians often accept what they are taught without question. It is in this sense that their interpretation is neither subjective nor objective. In other words, they have never taken the time to employ their minds subjectively in analyzing the Scripture for themselves, nor have they looked at the Scriptures ^[14] objectively. Their interpretations are “ready-made or prefabricated meanings.” Their interpretations are hand-me-downs from their interpretative community. Again, Fish rightly says, “In ^[15] other words interpretive communities are no more stable than texts because interpretive strategies are not natural or universal, but learned.” ^[16] In spite of Fish’s deconstruction philosophy, nevertheless, he is correct when he writes:

And, moreover, the way of seeing, whatever it was, would never be individual or idiosyncratic, since its source would always be the institutional structure of which the “seer” was an extending agent. This is what Sacks means when he says that a culture fills brains “so that they are alike in fine detail”; it fills them so that no one’s interpretive acts are exclusively his own but fall to him by virtue of his position in some socially organized ^[17] environment and are therefore always shared and public.

Leaders, especially ministers within the Churches of Christ, often memorize verses from the Bible by the hundreds. But their interpretation frequently is not so much theirs, as it is the interpretation of a social structure to which they belong; that is to say, their interpretative community. ^[18] Traditions still stand in the way of listening anew to the Biblical text. Once more, the Gonzalezs’ ^[19] caution: “We must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down to us.” It is still very difficult for individuals to conceive that one might cite Scripture and, at the same time, fail to apply the text correctly in light of its historical background.

Some religious writers within the Churches of Christ suppose they have all the answers. And as a result of this kind of intellectualization, the intellectually correct party ostracizes those who go against the grain with their particular interpretative community. To justify condemnation over against

the so-called nonconformist, then Matthew 7: 15 is cited: “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.”

One must be careful that one does not go to the Scriptures to prove what one already believes, but rather to see what they say. Many are so accustomed to reading the Bible as previously taught by generations of interpreters that they cannot distinguish between interpretation and revelation. In other words, for one to question the traditional interpretations is tantamount to questioning the Word of God

^[20] itself. This failure to discriminate between explanation and divine inspiration is one of the main obstacles that believers encounter in their efforts to liberate the Bible from its culture and to maintain unity among God’s people. The heritage of explaining is confused with the text itself. The faith of the fathers becomes the watchword for orthodoxy; the interpretation of the fathers becomes normative and is passed on as authoritative.

One of the most difficult obstacles for any Christian is to approach the text without any strong personal biases. Studying the Bible with colored glasses ultimately leads to distortion of the text. People often tend to give preconceived beliefs the same authority as they give to the Bible. In other words, one’s preconceived political power is equal to that of the Scriptures. One’s own personal journey of faith, with the ghosts of the past, makes it very difficult for one to view the Scriptures without prejudice. One’s prior understanding and interpretation makes it difficult to sift out the truths of God in dealing with the text. ^[21] The culture of one’s heritage controls the text of the Bible. One should never forget that one’s own journey occurs within a vast architecture of preunderstanding—no thinking takes place in a vacuum. ^[22] Frederic W. Farrar draws attention to the religious hatred that generates from this know-it-all attitude:

My opinions are founded on interpretations of Scripture. Scripture is infallible. My views of its meaning are infallible too. Your opinions and inferences differ from mine; therefore you must be in the wrong. All wrong opinions are capable of so many ramifications that any one who differs from me in minor points must be unsound in vital matters also. Therefore all who differ from me and my clique are “heretics.” All heresy is wicked; all heretics are necessarily wicked men. It is my religious duty to hate, calumniate and abuse ^[23] you.

CONTEXTUAL INTERPRETATION

The first step in explaining Scripture is to read the text. To fathom a passage involves the immediate context, the remote context, and the larger context. The *immediate context* includes verses preceding and following the reference that one is studying. On the other hand, the *remote context* may take in the entire book in which the text is found. Also, the *larger context* may embrace the whole of God’s written revelation. This understanding of contexts helps to determine the meaning or meanings that one attaches to any distinct phrase. Otherwise, the interpreter may impose conjectured convictions on a text without due reflection upon what the author says. Without a conception of a context, a person’s particular context tends to shape his/her understanding and interpretation of the message. Sidney Greidanus is correct when he says, “An interpreter must be careful not to read more into a text than is actually there at that particular stage of redemptive history.” ^[25]

Merely reciting Scriptures that draw attention to certain party dogmas is not sufficient to determine the meaning of the text. Remember that the context is the determining factor in trying to

arrive at a correct insight. One must not employ Holy Scripture in a way the Holy Spirit did not employ them. Leroy Garrett points out with justification that

People tire of our equating our understanding of the word of God with the word of God itself. This is to say that we must distinguish between revelation and interpretation. Revelation is what God has given us in scripture. Interpretation is what we conclude the scriptures to mean. One is divine, the other human. ^[26]

One may cite Matthew 7: 15—"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves"—correctly, but not necessarily speak *as* the Bible speaks. One may speak *where* the Bible speaks and not speak *as* the Bible speaks. In order to understand this passage of Scripture, it is necessary to study the whole of Matthew's Gospel before analyzing individual elements.

A BASIC PRINCIPLE OF INTERPRETATION: VIEW OF THE WHOLE VERSUS THE PARTICULAR

As one contemplates a study of the whole of Matthew's Gospel, it is imperative that one examine the full text before an analysis of its parts (for example, Matthew 7:15). If a reader explores a specific verse without weighing its sum total, then one's reflection may radically alter a correct view of a particular text. Examples of particularization of texts without contexts to support certain dogmatic presuppositions are rampant among many Christians. We may consider the following isolated Scriptures as examples of frequently cited texts that are misapplied by many sincere Christians to uphold a sectarian spirit that divides the Christian community for which Jesus prayed (John 17).

- Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves (Matthew 7:15).
- Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it (7:13-14). ^[27]
- If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell (5:29-30).
- But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also (5:39).
- Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you (7:1-2). ^[28]

It is not uncommon for interpreters to impose their own conceptual grids on a text without due reflection. When one approaches the Word of God, one should approach with a hermeneutics of suspicion. In other words, one should be conscious of his/her own fallibility in interpreting Scriptures. One's interpretation should always remain the object of suspicion and of critical

evaluation. Everyone must have a self-critical stance toward the tendency to impose one's own agenda upon the exposition of Scripture. This is especially true in the above Scripture citations (Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24).

For many believers, false prophets (7:15) are those who disagree with their brand of orthodoxy or interpretation of Scripture. Also, many appeal to the Scripture (7:13-14) about the small gate and the narrow road to give credence to their particular denominational stance as the only way to heaven. Some Christians have even taken the self-mutilation language (5:29-30) as a call to physical impairment of the body. Among the one-cup and non-Sunday school movement, the turning of the right cheek (5:39) is cited as justification for not defending one's country in the time of war.

One cannot necessarily just take the Scriptures at face value without seeking to understand the intent of the author. Everyone is to employ sound methods of interpretation in seeking to unfold the intended meaning of any text. One needs to develop the habit of working with the text in order to hear what the original hearers heard. Hopefully, this dissertation will assist one's understanding of the original setting in order to help remove twentieth century bifocals and journey back into the first century, to stand upon their threshold, to see through their eyes, and to think their thoughts. God's people must seek to read the Bible without colored glasses, which often leads to distortions; one must guard against his/her interpretation as equal to that of Scripture. To accomplish these objectives, it is necessary to learn how to read the Gospel of Matthew.

General Overview of the Gospel of Matthew

Matthew's Gospel is remembered for its Beatitudes, the Lord's Prayer, and the Golden Rule. The Gospel of Matthew is cherished for its union of gospel and ethics, of faith and morality. Matthew's Gospel is concerned to recover the moral and ethical aspects of the Christian life, something that the Old Testament prophets also sought to capture. Matthew speaks against those who set themselves over against the ethical instructions of Jesus. For Matthew, it is not sufficient just to accept Jesus as the Messiah, but one must obey Him. This is what the Sermon on the Mount is all about—ethical behavior that is pleasing to God. In fact, Matthew includes the stern warning of Jesus against those who do not obey God: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (7:21). Then, Matthew also concludes his Gospel with Jesus' admonition to His apostles to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (28:19-20). Thus, Matthew begins and ends the ministry of Jesus with a call to correct conduct.

The Gospel's Structure

Before one adventures into the narrative studies of the three major divisions of Matthew's [29] gospel, an analysis of the five major discourses in the Gospel of Matthew should help one in the identification of the false prophets of Jesus' time as well as the time of Matthew's writing this Gospel. The Gospel of Matthew appears to be written around five major discourses.

- The Sermon on the Mount (5:1—8:1)
- The Charge to the Apostles (chapter 10)
- The Parables (chapter 13)
- The Lesson on Forgiveness (chapter 18)
- The Judgment and End of Jerusalem (chapters 24—25)

Following the five discourses, Matthew gives a transition that concludes each major discourse:

- “When Jesus had finished saying these things” (7:28)
- “After Jesus had finished instructing” (11:1)
- “When Jesus had finished these parables” (13:53)
- “When Jesus had finished saying these things” (19:1)
- “When Jesus had finished saying all these things” (26:1)

Matthew’s Gospel can further be divided into ten sections in which “doing” and “teaching” alternate.

NARRATIVE	TEACHING	TRANSITION
1—4	5—7	7:28
8:1—9:34	9:35—10:42	11:1
11:2—12:50	13:1—52	13:53
13:53—17:27	18:1—35	19:1
19:1—23:39	24:1—25:46	26:1
26:1—28:20		
Passion Week		

Matthew portrays Jesus as *doer* and *teacher*. He records at least twenty miracles and six major messages. Approximately sixty percent of Matthew’s Gospel focuses on the teachings of Jesus. It is also significant that he arranges his material in a topical, rather than a chronological order. For instance, he groups ten miracles together in chapters 8—9. The above outline helps one to look at the discourses in context in order to arrive at a clearer understanding of the conflict that existed between Jesus and the Pharisees. Since this chapter is about the application of hermeneutical principals in seeking to identify the false prophets of whom Jesus spoke, it is necessary to devote some time to the history of the Pharisees and oral tradition. This history of the Pharisees for purposes of this study culminates in the events that transpired in Jamnia about 90 CE.

PHARISEES AND ORAL TRADITION

Orthodox Judaism is not simply “Old Testament theology without Jesus.” It is the religion of “You have heard it said.” This was Jesus’ repeated response to the erroneous oral teachings of the Pharisees. We can use the same technique today as we examine the ^[30] Talmud.

When Jesus appeared on the scene, He confronted over one hundred and fifty years of traditions from the Pharisees. Blomberg says, “According to Josephus, the Pharisees emerged at least as early as the reign of John Hyrcanus, opposing the combination of kingly and priestly power in the Hasmonean rulers.”^[31] Elwell and Yarbrough point out that the name “‘Pharisee’ probably derives from an Aramaic word meaning ‘separate’; hence, the Pharisees were ‘the separate ones.’”^[32] Since the synagogues were under their control and leadership, Blair calls attention to the strong influence ^[33] that the Pharisees had among the Israelites. It is this control that John the Baptist and Jesus encountered in the beginning of their ministries. There are three basic sources that individuals rely

upon for their information concerning the Pharisees: (1) Josephus, (2) the New Testament, and (3) rabbinic documents.

JOSEPHUS

The writings of Josephus help to shed light on Jesus' encounter with the religious leaders with their oral traditions. These oral traditions were later codified about 200 C.E. ^[34] The Pharisees built up a body of tradition that was as binding as the written Torah. Josephus in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, written ca. 94 CE, wrote of the traditions of the Pharisees:

What I would now explain is this, that the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers. ^[35]

The oral law was for the Pharisee equal to the written law. As Murphy has written, "The Pharisees built up a substantial body of tradition that was as binding for them as written Torah. This tradition probably corresponds to the later rabbinic idea of oral Torah. For the rabbis oral Torah was an integral part of the Torah given to Moses on Sinai, but it was passed on orally through the generations."^[36] The stress upon the Oral Torah by the Pharisees is what caused the Pharisees to confront Jesus about His disciples breaking the "tradition of the elders." Matthew preserves this encounter:

Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!" Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' he is not to 'honor his father' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.'" (Matthew 15:1-9).

^[37] In the time of Christ, the Pharisees numbered about six thousand. Josephus wrote about an incidence that occurred during the time of Herod the Great (37 BCE to 4 CE) which states the approximate number of Pharisees during this time.

(41) For there was a certain sect of men that were Jews, who valued themselves highly upon the exact skill they had in the law of their fathers, and made men believe they were highly favored by God, by whom this set of women were inveigled. These are those that are called the sect of the Pharisees, who were in a capacity of greatly opposing kings. A cunning sect they were, and soon elevated to a pitch of open fighting and doing mischief. (42) Accordingly, when all the people of the Jews gave assurance of their good will to Caesar, and to the king's government, these very men did not swear, being above six

thousand; and when the king imposed a fine upon them, Pheroras's wife paid their fine for them. [\[38\]](#)

Before approaching the second source (New Testament) of our knowledge about the Pharisees, a comment by Scheindlin graphically captures the role that the Pharisees played during the reigns of John Hyrcanus (134-104 BCE), Aristobulus I (104-103 BCE), Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 BCE), and Salome Alexandra (76-67 BCE).

Another group that was sometimes in opposition to the Hasmoneans was the Pharisees. They seem originally to have been non-priests who were eager to observe a strict rule of ritual purity and religious probity, and who therefore sometimes came into conflict with the authorities. Their leadership did not claim a cultic function, like the priests, but rather expertise in religious law and lore based on a body of religious traditions supplementary to the Torah, which they called 'the oral Torah.' They laid stress on the obligation of each individual to observe religious practices of ever-increasing complexity and detail, rather than simply relying on the priesthood to accomplish the nation's religious duties vicariously by offering sacrifices on their behalf. By the first century C.D., their number included some priests and aristocrats as well. [\[39\]](#)

NEW TESTAMENT

This background of the Pharisees from Josephus sets the stage for a proper understanding of the role that the Pharisees played in their plot to ultimately destroy Jesus who posed a threat to their authority. To grasp Pharisaic history, one must not study Phariseeism in isolation from its historical roots and the strong political power this group yielded during the time of John Hyrcanus, the ministry of Jesus, and the academy established in Jamnia following the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Jesus questioned their authority and this act got Him into trouble with the religious leaders.

As stated above the religion of the Pharisees is the religion of "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago" (Matthew 5:21). Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, dealt with the oral Torah of the Pharisees. This now-famous Sermon set the stage for the controversies that followed Jesus throughout His ministry. Davies aptly stresses the meaning of "You have heard" in his analysis of [\[40\]](#)

three passages in Matthew (12:1-14; 15:1-20; 19:1-19). In the first citation (12:1-14), Jesus discusses the Pharisees' oral traditions about the Sabbath; in the second reference (15:1-20), Jesus again addresses the oral Torah of the Pharisees concerning the laws of purity; and in the third quotation (19:1-19), He addresses their traditions concerning divorce.

Jesus, in the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, warned His disciples about false prophets (7:15). Prior to this admonition, Jesus went right to the heart of oral traditions. This analysis and condemnation of the oral Torah of the Pharisees by Jesus is conceded by many modern day scholars. Davies, one such scholar, assesses the true intent of the Sermon on the Mount when he writes, "the SM itself is not set forth as a 'new', revolutionary Law, in sharp antithesis to that given on Sinai." [\[41\]](#) Again, Davies points out, with justice, that the "You have heard" but "I tell you" is

Jesus' ethical demands set over against those of Judaism. [\[42\]](#) North also states the matter firmly: "The approach I have chosen here is to adopt Jesus' use of the technique, 'You have heard it said.' What He was attacking in each case was either a false tradition of the Pharisees or a false interpretation they imposed on an Old Testament text." [\[43\]](#)

Glasscock does not overstate the case when he says, “Jesus was about to attack the oral interpretation of the law, which most Jews of the time had been conditioned to accept as the Law itself. Six times in the next few verses he will challenge their oral traditions.”^[44] Hagner also notes that “By means of six bold antitheses representing the teaching of Jesus, Matthew now contrasts Jesus’ exposition of the true and ultimate meaning of the Torah with the more common, rabbinic understandings of the commandments.”^[45]

The oral Torah was not codified until ca. 200 CE.^[46] North illustrates through citations from the Mishnah and the Gemarah,^[47] which is the codification of the oral Torah,^[48] that there are contradictions between the written Torah and the oral Torah. Pilkington comments on the origin of the oral Torah: “The collection we now have in the Mishnah was edited by Rabbi Judah the Prince (*Ha-Nasi*), who lived from 135 to 217 CE. . . . ‘Oral’ is indeed an apt description of the Torah which followed the written Torah because it was essentially a record of oral discussion in courtrooms and academies.”^[49]

The Pharisees were in revolt against God’s written law; that is, the oral law was on par with the written law. The Jewish leaders carried out this rebellion in the name of God’s law. This melting together of the two laws caused Jesus to issue a scathing rebuke against the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. Matthew succinctly captures one such confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. “Woe to you, blind guides! You say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.’

You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.’ You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven swears by God’s throne and by the one who sits on it. “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything

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unclean (Matthew 23:15-27).

Jesus not only concludes His ministry with a scathing rebuke of the religious leaders, but He also began His ministry with a brief analysis of their rejection of the written Torah for their oral Torah. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus discusses the “You have heard” (oral Torah) with “but I say unto you” (written Torah). For an extra Biblical source (oral) of this kind of unbiblical reasoning can be found among Israel’s religious leaders. For instance, Rabbi Eleazar issued a statement—following the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE—upon the meaning of “bone of my bone

and flesh of my flesh.” His commentary is a classic example of “You have heard.” The Babylonian Talmud gives the following comment about Eleazar’s commentary: “R. Eleazar further stated: What is meant by the Scriptural text, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh? This teaches that Adam had intercourse with every beast and animal but found no satisfaction until he cohabited with

[\[51\]](#)

Eve.” If Matthew had recorded this saying, one could also find Jesus’ “but I say unto you”: “Anyone who has sexual relations with an animal must be put to death” (Exodus 22:19).

The Pharisees with their oral Torah exercised tremendous political power before, during, and after the ministry of Christ. It is in this regard to political power that Rosenberg draws attention to the domination that the Pharisees had even over the Sadducees:

Since the Sadducees were for the most part Temple priests and wealthy aristocrats, their influence over the people as a whole was rather limited, and during much of their existence they had to abide by the rulings and interpretations of the Pharisees (This extended even to the procedures of the Temple sacrifices, although the chief priests were themselves [\[52\]](#) Sadducees.) With the destruction of the Temple the Sadducees ceased to exist as a sect.

Their power extended even to the control of the synagogues. This control also existed even in the time of Jesus. Even when many of the leaders of Israel believed on Jesus, still they would not confess Him for fear of being thrown out of the synagogues by the Pharisees. John, an apostle of Jesus, writes about the tremendous influence exercised by the Pharisees: “Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise [\[53\]](#) from God (12:42-43).

Paul, a Pharisee, sets an example of the hatred of the Pharisees against Christians. In the Philippian letter, he describes his ancestry and earlier behavior toward the church: “If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee;

[\[54\]](#)

as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless” (Philippians 3:4-6). Luke calls attention, in his book to Theophilus, to the hatred exercised by some Pharisees against the followers of Jesus. One such person that Luke names is Paul; Luke lets his readers know that prior to Paul’s conversion that he gave his approval to the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1). Opposition to Stephen arose as a result of members from the “Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia” (6:9).

After the conversion of Paul, he, too, had to warn against the circumcision group (Titus 1:11). Paul tells Titus that

They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain. Even one of their own prophets has said, “Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.” This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth. To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good (1:11-16).

The Pharisees were a part of this circumcision group. When some men from Judea went to Antioch, they created problems by insisting that unless one was circumcised according to the Law of Moses, then one could not be saved (Acts 15:1). As a result of this controversy, a council met at Jerusalem (15:4). During the meeting of the church, which included the apostles and elders, Luke reports that “some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, ‘The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses’” (15:5). The influence of the Pharisees remained a viable force throughout the ministry of Paul. The Pharisees were so strong that they managed to survive the destruction of Jerusalem and establish a school in Jamnia (in Galilee).

POST-70 CE AND THE PHARISEES

Following the Jewish War, the center of Jewish life moved to Jabneh (in Greek, Jamnia) under the leadership of Johanan ben Zakkai. The priesthood, the sacrifices, and the temple worship ceased as a result of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. After 70 CE, the terms “Pharisee” and “scribe” drop out of common usage and is replaced with “rabbi.” The Jewish leaders who survived the fall of Jerusalem gathered at Jamnia, in western Judea, and began studying the Torah.

Johanan ben Zakkai, who opposed the war, managed to escape the city by letting it be understood that he was dead. The Romans allowed those in the city to carry out their dead in coffins and bury them outside the city. Once he was on the outside, he went to Vespasian who granted him the right to establish a school in Jamnia.^[55] The religious leadership passed from the priesthood to the rabbis. Scheindlin calls attention to the important roll that Johanan ben Zakkai played in establishing rabbinic Judaism following the destruction of Jerusalem. He writes,

What had to be guaranteed was the religious tradition embodied in the Torah and in the ever-proliferating body of religious laws. Johanan ben Zakkai and his colleagues thus took an important step in reorganizing Judaism into rabbinic Judaism, the form of the religion most widespread until the present. Rabbinic Judaism centers on the constant study of the torah and the oral traditions associated with it and involves the meticulous observance of religious regulations, which are understood as constituting a legal system. By placing the study of the Torah at the center of Jewish religious life, the rabbis incidentally laid the foundation for the preoccupation of later Jewish culture with intellectual activities of all kinds.^[56]

Thus concludes Lavinia and Cohn-Sherbok that “It was the pharisaic interpretation of the law that survived and was continued in the work of the rabbis.”^[57] The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE did not destroy the political clout of the Pharisees. Even before the destruction of the temple, the interpretive tradition was well developed. Rabbi Rosenberg says,

Because this interpretive tradition was well developed by the time of the Temple’s destruction in the great revolt, Judaism was able to survive. Since the largest portion of the people looked to the Pharisaic sages for guidance, the end of the sacrificial system in the Jerusalem temple could be accepted, for the Pharisees mandated other forms of religious expression that could take its place.^[58]

Sanders’ writings also collaborate the findings of Rosenberg: “The Hasidim (at the time of the Hasmonean revolt) were Pharisees, and the post-70 rabbis were Pharisees; throughout the whole

period 175 BCE to 135 CE the populace basically followed the Pharisees.”^[61] This history of the Pharisees before and after the destruction of Jerusalem helps one to understand more clearly the ones to whom the term “false prophets” refer in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5—7) in His castigation of the religious leaders in Israel (Matthew 23) and in His Eschatological Discourse (Matthew 24).

JAMNIA

Some scholars espouse a date of 85—100 CE for the writing of the Gospel of Matthew.^[62] This date is given in conjunction with the events that transpired in Jamnia ca. 90 CE. This notion of a late date is advanced in order to maintain that Matthew’s purpose in writing was to combat rabbinic Judaism in Jamnia. But Carson approaches the purpose and early date with caution: “It is unwise to specify too precise an occasion and purpose, because the possibility of error and distortion increases

as one leaves hard evidence behind for supposition.”^[63] It appears, so it seems to me, that Matthew’s Gospel is dealing with the establishment of the identity of Jesus. But in this identity, Matthew records

many of the encounters between Jesus and the religious leaders.^[64] Matthew’s Gospel sets forth the uneasy feelings between Jesus and the religious leaders. The Gospel is not so much anti-Jewish as it is anti-Jewish leaders in their conflict with Jesus the Messiah.^[65]

Murphy asserts that Matthew rewrote the traditions to make the Pharisees look worse.^[66] One cannot but be respectful to the suggestion, but difficulties remain with his presuppositions. He correctly assesses the events that surrounded Jamnia when he writes about the Pharisees and Jamnia, but when he asserts that this Gospel was written to combat rabbinic Judaism in Jamnia, he cites no concrete evidence to substantiate his allegations:

After the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE, a group of Pharisees, scribes, and others gathered at Jamnia to restructure Jewish society in the absence of the Temple and its establishment. They confirmed the Torah as the center of the life of the Jewish people, and made Pharisaic interpretation normative for all. Torah teachers were now called rabbis. The budding Christian movement now faced not a multiplicity of groups, but a rabbinic Judaism that claimed that it alone was normative. This caused the Christians to define themselves over against rabbinic Judaism. Many have seen the activity at Jamnia

as the background against which to read the Gospel of Matthew.^[67]

As noted above from the writings of Josephus and the New Testament, it goes almost without saying that Pharisaism dominated pre-70 Judaism as well as post-70 rabbinic Judaism. There are substantial continuities between them concerning an emphasis on non-biblical or oral traditions.^[68] The Gospel of Matthew is a book of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders during His ministry. Jamnia does confirm the entrenchment that the Pharisees had during Jesus’ ministry; they never lost their zeal for the traditions of the elders—before and after the destruction of Jerusalem. Sanders also calls attention to the name change of the Pharisees following the destruction of the Jerusalem: “After the destruction of Jerusalem, they led the reconstruction of Judaism, giving up their party name,^[69] becoming more catholic, and taking the title ‘rabbis’, ‘teachers’.”

CONCLUSION

This chapter sought to make interpreters conscious of how prior understanding can affect one's current understanding of Scripture. All Christians who open God's Word and read it bring with them the forestructures of their lives formed by their history, their language, and their culture in which they live, therefore it is imperative upon every reader to capture the original intent of the author. Since no one can approach the text without presuppositions, then one must exercise every safeguard to interpret the Word of God correctly.

This chapter has only skimmed the surface in the area of interpretation to set the stage for an identification of the false prophets in Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24. The objective of Chapter 3 has been to help Christians to continue to correctly handle the Word of truth (2. Timothy 2:15).

Since the Gospel of Matthew is a story, that is to say, a narrative about the life of Jesus, then the next chapter presents a brief overview of the Gospel of Matthew as narrative in order to grasp more fully the principles of interpretation in identifying false prophets in Matthew's Gospel. An understanding of narrative studies should help one in reading Matthew's Gospel. In order to ascertain the identity of the false prophets with whom Jesus and Matthew had dispute, then an awareness of plot (story line) in narrative studies should help one to correctly classify the phony prophets in Matthew 7:15 and 24:11, 24. This chapter discusses in detail the benefits of narrative studies in seeking a correct application or interpretation of any individual text or texts.

[1] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 60.

[2] Kathleen Morner and Ralph Rausch, "Hermeneutics," *NTC's Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Illinois: NTC Publishing Group, 1991), 97. This dissertation applies the hermeneutic circle in order to identify the false prophets in the Gospel of Matthew. Application of this principle of interpretation is adopted in chapter four, which sets forth the whole of Matthew in order to understand its individual components, especially Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24.

[3] Ibid.

[4] See Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 17, where Stein writes: "The term 'hermeneutics,' . . . simply describes the practice or discipline of interpretation; Thomas H. Olbright, *Hearing God's Voice* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1996), 185, where he says, "In a large sense, hermeneutics constitutes a theory about how one person explains or communicates a text to another."

[5] See Morner and Rausch, "Exegesis," Ibid., 72,73, where they say, "Originally, the detailed analysis, explanation, and INTERPRETATION of passages in the Bible, or, by extension, of any literary or intellectual text. The term carries with it a sense of digging out the meaning of a difficult passage."

[6] See Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 25.

[7] L. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962), 12.

[8] John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook, Revised Edition* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1987), 23..

[9] Cedric B. Johnson, *The Psychology of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 20. See Appendix V, Dallas Burdette, "Passover Traditions in the First Century," for an example of the application of the above principles—"linguistic, cultural, and historical background."

[\[10\]](#) Berkhof, *Interpretation*, 28-29.

[\[11\]](#) See Hayes and Holladay, *Exegesis*, 66, where they write:

The best guide to the meaning of a word is the context in which it is used. This means, first of all, the immediate context of the passage in which it occurs. If a word has several meanings, one should explore the range of meanings and see how they fit or do not fit in the context. A broader context is the whole of the document in which the terms appear. One should explore how a term is used and what it denotes elsewhere in the document.

[\[12\]](#) Johnson, *Interpretation*, 45.

[\[13\]](#) See Appendix VII, Dallas Burdette, “My Pilgrimage of Faith,” in which I develop the evolution of my thinking in my Christian journey. This article is informative in that I discuss basic principles of how to interpret. This essay discusses many of the “pit falls” that I encountered on my spiritual journey as a boy preacher. To a great extent, my earlier spiritual journey could be described as “Gullible’s Travels.”

[\[14\]](#) Stanley Fish, *Is There A Text in This Class?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), 172.

[\[15\]](#) Fish does not use “interpretative community” but “interpretive community.”

[\[16\]](#) Ibid. I disagree with Fish’s philosophy of the text being unstable. If I understand Fish correctly, he is a deconstructionist in his philosophy. See Morner and Rausch, “Deconstructive Criticism,” *NTC’s Dictionary*, 50-51, where they explain “deconstruction”:

An approach to LITERARY CRITICISM based on the views and procedures of the French thinker Jacques Derrida. Deconstructive criticism utilizes reader-centered theories of meaning that ignore reference to the author’s intention and deny the possibility of a terminable meaning or “correct” interpretation for any text. Deconstructive criticism makes possible innumerable contradictory but “undecidable” meanings. First becoming prominent in the 1970s, deconstructive criticism is central to POST-STRUCTURALISM.

[\[17\]](#) Ibid., 335.

[\[18\]](#) See Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 48-68.

[\[19\]](#) Ibid., 31.

[\[20\]](#) For an insightful article on the differentiation between Revelation and interpretation, see Leroy Garrett, “It Means What It Says,” *Restoration Review* 17, no. 4 (April 1975) : 68-71.

[\[21\]](#) See Johnson, *Interpretation* , 42, where he captures, in concise language, the subjective biases of all interpreters:

My contention is that conflicting theological positions are in part due to the fact that we all approach a text, sacred or secular, with our strong subjective biases. Even though we have a commitment to read the Bible on its own terms: and even though we want the Divine and human authors to speak for themselves, somehow we still come up with contradictory views on some issues.

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For an excellent presentation of this concept, see Gonzalez and Gonzalez, “Difficulties in Hearing the Text,” in *Preaching*, 29-47.

[23]

See Appendix VII for my essay dealing with the evolution of my thinking during the early years of my ministry. This essay—“My Pilgrimage of Faith,”—is a record of my own personal journey, with its struggles and heartaches. Hopefully this explanation of my own problems will give encouragement to others to reexamine their own traditions in the light of the context of Scriptures.

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Frederick W. Farrar, “Religious Hatred,” quoted in Carl Ketcherside, *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 6 (June 1965): 92.

[25]

Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 71.

[26]

Garrett, “It Means What It Says,” 69.

[27]

See Appendix VIII, Dallas Burdette, “The Narrow Gate” for a contextual study of Matthew 7:13-14.

[28]

See Appendix IX, Dallas Burdette, “Judge Not” for a contextual study of Matthew 7:1-2.

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See Chapter 4 for a detailed study of this three-fold division.

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Gary North, *The Judeo-Christian Tradition: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), 73.

[31]

Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 47. For an excellent overview of this time period, see Raymond P. Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People: From Legendary Times to Modern Statehood* (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1998), 25-49.

[32]

Walter A. Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 56. Elwell and Yarbrough add some additional information to the history of the Pharisees: “They came into being sometime before the New Testament era. According to Josephus they gained prominence during the reigns of John Hyrcanus I (135/4—104 B.C.) and Alexandra (76-67 B.C.), Ibid. The date of the Pharisees predates even the reign of Hyrcanus. Josephus mentions the Pharisees’ activities during the time of Jonathan (B.C. 161-143; *Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. 13, Ch. 5, Sect. 7, Par. 161 and Sect. 9, Par. 171, in Whiston, 345, 346. For an excellent history of the Pharisees, see E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice & Belief, 66 BCE—66 CE* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), 380-451.

[33]

Joe Blair, *Introducing the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 42.

[34]

See Rabbi Roy A. Rosenberg, *The Concise Guide to Judaism: History, Practice, Faith* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 67, where he says,

The early tradition of the Pharisees had held that, while the written Torah was meant to be transmitted in written form, the oral Torah was not to be put in writing. The teachings of the sages were to be memorized, rather, and transmitted by word of mouth from scholar to scholar. It did not take long, of course, for the number of interpretations and decisions that constituted the oral Torah to become so vast that even the most brilliant scholars would have trouble recalling all of them (they also had to remember the names of the various sages who had originated or transmitted a decision). For this reason the head of the academy in the early years of the third century, Rabbi Judah the Nasi (“prince,” or “patriarch”), resolved to reduce the oral Torah to writing. . . . Then in about 220 A. D., he introduced the first authoritative summary of the rabbinic tradition to that date. This was the *Mishna* (“repetition”). The Mishna, based upon the laws of the Hebrew

Bible, is the source of all subsequent Jewish law to the present day and is an object of study in the academies of all the forms of Judaism.

[\[35\]](#) See William Whiston, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. XIII, Ch. X, Sect. 6, Par. 297, in *The Works of Josephus*, New Updated Edition (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1987), 355.

[\[36\]](#) Frederick J. Murphy, *The Religious World of Jesus: An Introduction to Second Temple Palestinian Judaism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 223.

[\[37\]](#) See N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 377, where he has an interesting comment about the six thousand Pharisees:

We do not know for sure how many Pharisees there were in the time of Jesus. The figure of six thousand, often quoted in this context from Josephus *Antiquities* 17.42, refers specifically to the Pharisees who refused to take the oath of allegiance to Caesar, some time in the reign of Herod the Great. In the forty years or so between that incident and the time of Jesus several important political events had taken place, which might well have induced many more to join the movement. We may assume that there were in any case plenty of Pharisees who were not involved with the particular incident in question, and more again who were generally sympathetic to the movement.

[\[38\]](#) Josephus, *Antiquity of the Jews*, Bk. 17, Ch. 2, Sect. 4, Par. 41-42, in *Josephus*, 453. I am indebted to Frederick J. Murphy for this citation.

[\[39\]](#) Scheindlin, *Jewish People*, 40. His statement about “ever-increasing complexity” reminds one of Jesus’ criticism of the Pharisees: They tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them (Matthew 23:4).

[\[40\]](#) W. D. Davies, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 30.

[\[41\]](#) Ibid., 31.

[\[42\]](#) Ibid., 87.

[\[43\]](#) North, *Tradition*, 86. See also Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, expanded edition with replies to critics (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co, 1984), where he says, “These radical commands (vv. 21-48) do not supercede the Older Testamental law; they illustrate and explain it. . . . The law demanded inner sanctification and its outward expression; the scribes and Pharisees disregarded the former and perverted the latter.”

[\[44\]](#) Ed Glasscock, *Moody Gospel Matthew Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 116.

[\[45\]](#) Donald A. Hagner, Word Biblical Commentary, vol., 33a, *Matthew 1—13* (Dallas, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1993), 111.

[\[46\]](#) See Rosenberg, *Judaism*, 67; Murphy, *Jesus*, 235.

[\[47\]](#) This combination is called the Babylonian Talmud.

[\[48\]](#) North, *Tradition*, 84-105. See also Adin Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud*, translated from the Hebrew by Chaya Galai (USA: Basic Books, 1976), where he explains the Talmud:

The formal definition of the Talmud is the summary of oral law that evolved after centuries of scholarly effort by sages who lived in Palestine and Babylonia until the beginning of the Middle Ages. It has two main components: the Mishnah, a book of *halakhah* (law) written in Hebrew; and the commentary on the Mishnah, known as the Talmud (or Gemarah), in the limited sense of the word, a summary of discussion and elucidation of the Mishnah written in Aramaic-Hebrew jargon.

This explanation, however, though formally correct, is misleading and imprecise. The Talmud is the repository of thousands of years of Jewish wisdom, and the oral law, which is as ancient and significant as the written law (the Torah), finds expression therein.

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C. M. Pilkington, *Judaism* (US: NTC Publishing Group, 1995), 37. For a copy of the Mishnah, see Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

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See Chapter 5 for an analysis of Jesus' rebuke of the religious leaders.

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See Babylonian Talmud, *Yebamoth 63a*, in *The Soncino Talmud* [CD-ROM]. Available from Davaka's Judaic Software, item no., Win CD #1W691B, call 1-800-621-8227 for this CD, cost \$299.00, [accessed 3 March 1999]. I am indebted to North for this citation; see North, *Tradition*, 86-87. Also see North for many examples as illustrated above in his book, *Ibid.*, 84-105.

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Rosenberg, *Judaism*, 61.

[53]

See E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice & Belief 63 BCE—66 CE*, (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), 388-412, for a detailed study of the influence and control the Pharisees had in the first century.

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See also Galatians 1:13f.; 1 Corinthians 15:9; Acts 8:3; 9:1, 21; 22:4, 19; 26:10f.; 1 Thessalonians 2:14f.; Galatians 4:29; 6:12.

[55]

Lavinia and Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *A Popular Dictionary of Judaism* (Illinois: NTC Publishing Group, 1997), 87.

[56]

Albert A. Bell, *Exploring the New Testament World: An Illustrated Guide to the World of Jesus and the First Christians*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 37.

[57]

Scheindlin, *Jewish People*, 52. See also Lavinia, "Johanan ben Zakkai," in *Judaism*, 88.

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Scheindlin, *Jewish People*, 53.

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Lavinia, "Pharisee," in *Judaism*, 134.

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Rosenberg, *Judaism*, 66.

[61]

Sanders, *Judaism*, 400.

[62]

See David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 48-55. See also Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1—13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol., 33a (Texas: Word Book, 1993), lxxiii—lxxv, for caution on both sides of the issue of dating. See also D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 75-81, for a conservative view on the provenance, date, and destination of the Gospel of Matthew.

[63]

D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in Frank E. Gaebelein, vol., 8, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 22.

[\[64\]](#) See Chapter 5 for a more detailed explanation of the role the religious leaders played in the Gospel of Matthew.

[\[65\]](#) Carson, “Matthew,” in *Bible Commentary*, 20.

[\[66\]](#) Murphy, *Jesus*, 232.

[\[67\]](#) Ibid.. 234.

[\[68\]](#) Sanders, *Judaism*, 413.

[\[69\]](#) Ibid., 412.

CHAPTER 4

NARRATIVE OVERVIEW OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Any hermeneutic that locates revelation primarily in the past is inevitably pessimistic. The very passing of time, which is definitive of history, distances us from the significant event and places us at an ever-greater disadvantage. The sentiment that accompanies such a perspective is the suspicion that we are missing something: if only we had been there, we would understand better. The hermeneutic that undergirds narrative criticism challenges this prejudice. Revelation is given through the story, which remains with us today. We are, in fact, in a privileged position, for the story interprets the events for us in ways that we might never have grasped if we had simply been there to witness them transpire in history.

[\[1\]](#)

LITERARY CRITICISM

This chapter details the three major divisions in the Gospel of Matthew in order to understand more clearly whom the false prophets are that Jesus warns His disciples about. To accomplish this objective, literary techniques are employed to capture the conflict that envelops the whole of Matthew's Gospel. This overall analysis of the principles of literary interpretation should assist one in identifying the false prophets in the three different occurrences of the phrase by Jesus. The identity of Jesus is the focal point of all three major sections in Matthew. Chapter 4 draws attention to the various viewpoints espoused by the God, and the civil/religious leaders in Israel. This chapter reveals that unethical behavior and a denial that Jesus is the Son of God calls forth the epithet "false prophets."

Since God's revelation is given in story form to His people, this form of communication enables them to arrive at a more precise identification of false prophets in the Gospel of Matthew. One can read the narrative by Matthew and follow the plot for an accurate description of the

[\[2\]](#)

misleading instructors. This chapter is an overview of the Gospel from a literary perspective. Chapter 4 is an extension of Chapter 3 in that it continues to explore the principles of exposition through the means of narrative investigation. Literary criticism controls the looseness that is

[\[3\]](#)

frequently employed in the investigation of a solitary phrase.

Literary criticism recognizes that a single text or multiple texts are a part of a larger whole.

[\[4\]](#)

The three occurrences of "false prophets" in the Gospel of Matthew can be properly exegeted when they are considered fragments of a continuous composition. Hayes and Holladay have correctly stated: "In attempting to understand a particular text, the exegete should seek to see the text within the

[\[5\]](#)

structure of the major context as well as within the structure of the sub-units." When the reader posses questions about the literary placement of certain passages, he/she is able to arrive at certain conclusions that might otherwise be missed. Literary analysis of a text helps one to focus more closely upon the individual texts. This form of interpretation assists one in grasping more fully the intent of the author.

This philosophy of interpretation dealing with the complete text is thoroughly worked out by Mark Allen Powell in his study guide on narrative criticism.^[6] He points out justly so that "Literary criticism focuses on the finished form of the text."^[7] Again, Powell states the matter even more firmly, "Literary analysis does not dissect the text but discerns the connecting threads that hold it together."^[8] Dissecting the text from its context contributes often times to an improper application of the text.^[9] The goal of literary criticism is to read the text as the *implied reader*^[10] read the text.

The Implied Reader

The *implied reader* may know things that are not in the text. But, on the other hand, the *real reader* frequently consults outside reading in order to understand the text more fully.^[11] Seymour Chatman in drawing attention to the meaning of the *implied reader* puts it this way: "The counterpart of the implied author is the *implied reader*—not the flesh-and-bones you or I sitting in our living rooms reading the book, but the audience presupposed by the narrative itself."^[12] Narrative criticism helps to narrow the gap between the *real reader* and the *implied reader*.^[13] This chapter (4) is a narrative construction of Matthew's gospel in order to try to comprehend as clearly as possible the discernment of the *implied reader* (original reader) as to who the false prophets are in the Gospel of Matthew.

Plot

As one begins to read the narrative penned by Matthew, one is immediately made aware that there is a plot.^[14] Whenever one has a plot, one has a story.^[15] Chatman defines story as consisting of two parts—story and discourse.^[16] For Chatman story has to do with a chain of events (actions, happenings) whereas discourse is the means by which the story (content) is communicated.^[17] Jack Kingsbury, adopting the definition of Chatman, applies this concept to the story of Matthew's narrative by demonstrating that "The 'story' of Matthew is of the life of Jesus from conception and birth to death and resurrection."^[18] On the other hand, Kingsbury in his differentiation between story and discourse says, "The 'discourse' of Matthew is the means whereby this story of Jesus' life is told."^[19] In other words, the story is *what* is told whereas discourse is *how* the story is told.^[20] E. M. Forster as early as 1927 says, "a story is a narrative of events arranged in time sequence."^[21] This arrangement of events is self-evident when one looks at the Gospel of Matthew as story.

Chatman also describes a story as consisting of three parts—events, characters, and settings.^[22] The events are the strings of movements that stretch out from the beginning to the end of the story; in other words, the events cover the whole distance of the report. One dominant trait in Matthew is the reporting of conflict (events) between Jesus and the religious leaders. It is these events that comprise the plot, or flow, of the narration. An understanding of plot can deepen one's understanding of who the false prophets were in the Gospel of Matthew. Morner and Rausch thoughtfully define plot as

The careful arrangement by an author of INCIDENTS in a NARRATIVE to achieve a desired effect. Plot is more than simply the series of happenings in a literary work. It is the result of the writer's deliberate selection of interrelated actions (what happens) and choice [22] of arrangement (the order of happening) in presenting and resolving a CONFLICT.

[23]

One cannot read Matthew's story [23] and not observe his choice of arrangements in presenting his story of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. Matthew foreshadows the hostility between Jesus and the leaders of Israel in his first section (1:1—4:16); next, he describes indirect collision (4:17—11:1); then he pictures direct confrontation (11:2—16:20); and, finally the friction is resolved in the crucifixion of Jesus (16:21—28:20). An understanding of plot (sequence of events) facilitates comprehension of the whole. There is a difference between story and plot. Forster's comments on this distinction are worthy of citation.

We have defined a story as a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence. A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. "The king died and then the queen died" is a story. "The king died, and then the queen died of grief" is a plot. The [24] time-sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it.

[25]

In the development of plot, one recognizes the translating of characters into action. [25] In the plot of Matthew's story, conflict exists between two opposing forces—Jesus and the religious leaders. Matthew's plot structure begins with exposition (important background information), and then develops the build-up of tension between opposing forces and finally the plot arrangement reaches a climax in its resolution of the conflict—the death of Jesus. [26] In narrative writing, there is a beginning, middle, and end to plot. [27]

Point of View

In examining plot in Matthew's story, one is immediately confronted with various evaluative [28] points of view about the identity of Jesus. [28] "The notion of point of view is a pervasive one in narrative criticism," says Powell. [29] There is a contrast in the book of Matthew between God's point of view and the religious leaders' point of view concerning the identity of Jesus. One also observes other points of view concerning the crowds. If one's point of view does not harmonize with God's point of view as revealed in Matthew 3: 17 and 17:5, then that individual is not thinking the things of [30] God, but rather the things of men (16:23).

As one peruses the book of Matthew, one cannot help but observe various points-of-view [31] about Jesus? [31] One encounters Matthew's point of view about Jesus in the prologue (chapters 1 and 2). Also in the prologue, Matthew gives a foretaste of the religious leaders' point-of-view about Jesus. [32]

Following the baptism of Jesus, Matthew reveals God's point-of-view about who Jesus really is. Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, one is confronted over and over with various points of view as to who Jesus really is.

As one moves from the disciples to the Jewish crowds and then to the religious leaders, one observes the degree to which each group deviates from thinking the things of God to thinking the things of men. Matthew records one such example in which one of the disciples did not think the

things of God. For instance, he informs his readers that as Jesus begins His journey to Jerusalem to die for the sins of mankind that He rebukes Peter for not having in mind the thinking of God. Matthew records this encounter: “Jesus turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men’” (16:23). In other words, Peter did not think the things of God concerning the necessity of the atonement, but rather the things of men in his seeking to prevent God’s purpose for the salvation of mankind through the sacrificial offering of Jesus for the sins of the world.

One purpose of this chapter is to investigate the various view points set forth by the numerous characters in the Gospel of Matthew to see how well the characters’ point of view coincides with that of God’s. In order to accomplish this target, it is necessary to cover briefly the structure of Matthew’s history of salvation. This chapter will reveal that the religious leaders’ point of view was in direct opposition to God’s point of view. This rejection of God’s point of view by the leaders of Israel called forth from Jesus the epithet—false prophets.

THE STRUCTURE OF MATTHEW’S HISTORY OF SALVATION

Three Major Divisions in Matthew

There are three broad segments in Matthew’s gospel.^[33] The three segments are: (1) The unveiling of Jesus’ identity [1:1—4:16];^[34] (2) The ministry of Jesus to Israel and Israel’s repudiation of Jesus [4:17—16:20];^[35] and (3) The pilgrimage of Jesus to Jerusalem, which also includes an account of His crucifixion, burial, and resurrection [16:21—28:20].^[36] It appears that Matthew employs a formula to signal the beginning of each new part. For example, he says, following the end of segment one: “From that time on Jesus began to preach” (4:17) and with the beginning of section three: “From that time on Jesus began to explain” (16:21). Did Matthew intend to call attention to important turns in his story? If so, this gives rise to the above outline.^[37]

It seems appropriate to analyze the book of Matthew from the perspective of three major divisions to more clearly grasp the development of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. Even if this division is not the real intent of Matthew, nevertheless, this three-part partition can still assist one in understanding the Word of God more clearly. As the reader advances through the three groupings, it will become apparent that there is progression in the story of Jesus. In the first part (1:1—4:16), Matthew foreshadows^[38] the conflict with the religious leaders who are also called false prophets in 7:15. In Part Two (4:17—16:20) the conflict with the religious leaders begin, but with Part Three (16:21—28:20) the confrontation with the religious leaders escalates to the point of their putting Him to death (26:57-67; 27:32-55).^[39]

FIRST MAJOR SECTION: 1:1—4:16

The aim of this first section is to “present Jesus to the reader so that he/she will know throughout the rest of the story precisely who Jesus is.”^[40] As one approaches this first section (1:1—4:16), there does appear to be literary unity from beginning to end. For example, consider the following scenario that testifies to the unity of 1:1—4:16. For instance, the formula quotation in Matthew 2:23 is linked to the formula quotation in 4:12-16 through the naming of the geographical location of His ministry:

- “And he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: ‘He will be called a Nazarene.’”
- “When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”

Again, Matthew (2:15) informs us that Joseph took Jesus to Egypt,

- “Where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘Out of Egypt I called my son.’”

These three citations (2:23; 4:12-16; 2:15) along with the baptismal declaration (3:17) declare the unity of 1:1—4:16. The baptismal declaration reads: “And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’” This passage (3:17) is foreshadowed by the prophecy in 2:15. Also, 4:12-16 is reflective of the fulfillment prediction in 2:23. The identity of Jesus also acts as glue that gives cohesion to Part One. This section (1:1—4:16) also foreshadows the false prophets that Jesus addresses in His Sermon on the Mount as well as His eschatological discourse (Chapter 24).

THE IDENTITY OF JESUS

God’s Evaluative Point of View

In this first section (1:1—4:16), Matthew unveils Jesus’ identity. In this division, one finds the most climatic statement regarding the identity of Jesus. The ultimate declaration as to the identity of Jesus is from God in the baptismal scene of Jesus: “And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased’” (3:17). In this baptismal pericope, God personally enters the world of Matthew’s story and declares Jesus to be His Son in whom He is pleased. ^[41] God in making this declaration expresses His evaluative point of view concerning Jesus’ real identity, that is to say, how He thinks about Jesus. For one to trace properly the flow of Matthew’s story from beginning to end, one must consider the first part as a major contribution to the unfolding of the Jesus drama. Before developing God’s evaluative point of view in more detail, it will be helpful to consider other points of view about Jesus in this first segment.

Matthew’s Evaluative Point of View

Matthew’s point of view is that Jesus is the Son of God. ^[42] For example, in the prologue, Matthew sets the tone for the development of the real identity of Jesus—Jesus is the Son of God. To illustrate, Matthew, after revealing the angel’s announcement of the birth of Jesus, adds his own comments, which reveals his own point of view:

She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the

prophet: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us” (1:21-23).

Matthew reveals his point of view about Jesus by citing the virgin birth prophecy (Isaiah 7:14). This reference also discloses God’s hand in the scheme of redemption for sinful man. Since Jesus is the supreme player, Matthew immediately advances the Davidic and Messiah-King claims through the genealogy (Matthew 1:1-17). Matthew lets us know that God has guided the whole of Israel’s history in the promises He made to Abraham (Genesis 17:1-9)^[43] and David (Isaiah 11:1). Matthew informs his readers that even in the face of the Babylonian captivity (Matthew 1:12) God was still in control. Since Jesus as the Messiah is the heir of Abraham and David, Matthew begins his Gospel by calling attention to this truth: “A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham” (1:1). It is also significant that in this genealogy that Matthew combines the name Jesus with the name Christ. The name Jesus Christ (1:1, 21) also makes known God’s point of view as well as Matthew’s point of view.

The name Jesus is descriptive of His mission. On the other hand, the term Christ is descriptive of His being appointed by the Father. Since Matthew gives the personal name of the Messiah as Jesus (1:16), the reader should give special attention to the importance of this name. This name assigned to Jesus is of heavenly origin. Matthew informs us that an angel of God instructed Joseph to name Him Jesus (1:20-21). Matthew chronicles Joseph’s response to the angel: “He gave him the name Jesus” (1:25). Matthew sounds the identity of Jesus through the genealogy of names and the titles placed at the beginning of his account.

In the name Jesus, one discovers that God is active in Him for the salvation of mankind. Matthew not only refers to the one born in Bethlehem as Jesus, but he also adds the title Christ for further identification. Christ is the title of Jesus, not his name. Among all the titles assigned to Jesus, Christ is the most general. Matthew not only affirms in 1:1 that Jesus is the Christ, or Messiah—a confession that Peter will later make (16:16)—but also that he is “Son of David” and “Son of Abraham.”

Matthew includes the genealogy to assert that God has guided the whole of Israel’s history so that it might culminate in the birth of Jesus. For Matthew, Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of David, and the Son of Abraham. Thus, Matthew in this first section (1:1—4:16) sets forth his evaluative point of view as to who Jesus really is. From the beginning of his Gospel, Matthew informs us that Jesus is Christ, and, then concludes the final chapter of Christ’s rejection of Israel’s leaders by recording Pilate’s question to the chief priest and elders (27:20): “‘What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?’ Pilate asked” (27:22). Even the high priest in Jesus’ final hours asked Him, “I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God” (26:63). Did Jesus refuse to answer the high priest because He knew that his question was not sincere? Observe the contrast between the Magi and the religious leaders—the Magi worshipped Him, but the religious leaders cried out: “Crucify him!” (27:22).

The Magi’s Evaluative Point of View About Jesus

Following the birth of Jesus, the Magi from the East arrived in Jerusalem and inquired about Him who is born “born King of the Jews” (2:2). This phrase, “king of the Jews,” sets forth the evaluative point of view of the Magi concerning Jesus’ identity. In fact, the rest of 2:2 reads: “We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.” Immediately, in Matthew’s story, one quickly observes the contrast between Herod and the Magi. The Magi’s evaluation point of view is in harmony with God’s evaluative point of view. Matthew begins his Gospel with a reference to Jesus

as “king of the Jews” and concludes the passion narrative with a reference to Jesus as the “king of the Jews” (27:37).

When Jesus was brought before Pilate, he inquired of Him to tell him if he were the “king of the Jews.” Matthew records Pilate’s question and Jesus’ answer: “Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ ‘Yes, it is as you say,’ Jesus replied” (27:11). Jesus response reinforces the response of the Magi. Again, in the closing scene of Jesus’ crucifixion, one finds this name over the cross: “Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS” (27:37).

Herod and the Religious Leaders’ Point of View

Herod’s evaluative point of view is not in harmony with God’s. To illustrate Herod’s point of view, it is necessary to turn to Matthew’s prologue to observe his actions about learning of the birth of Jesus. Matthew says, “When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. Get up, he said, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill Him” (2:13). Herod and the religious leaders are closely tied together in this story. Matthew sets the stage for the further development of the animosity of the leaders against Jesus.

In this First Section (1:1—4:16), Matthew foreshadows the rejection of Jesus by the “chief priests and the teachers [scribes] of the law” (2:4) when they do not respond to what they know to be true. When Herod inquired of them as to where the Christ should be born, they responded correctly, but did not act on that knowledge: “‘In Bethlehem in Judea,’ they replied, ‘for this is what the prophet has written’” (2:5). Matthew suggests beforehand the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders that will ultimately end in His death. As Jesus completes His ministry to Israel, He forewarns his disciples about the clandestine operation of the religious leaders: “From that time on Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life” (16:21).

Again, Matthew reveals Jesus’ prediction about His death by the leaders of Israel: “When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, ‘The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life.’ And the disciples were filled with grief” (17:22-23). Finally, for the third time, Jesus reveals the evaluative point of view of the leaders in that He once more makes known their intent to destroy Him: “Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, ‘We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!’” (20:17-19).

As Matthew concludes his Gospel, he draws attention to the religious leaders (referred to as false prophets in 7:15 and 24:11,24) in their final outrage against Him.

In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him (27:41-44).

“He saved others” is reflective of 1:21; “He’s the King of Israel” is reflective of 2:2; and “I am the Son of God” is reflective of 3:17. The chief priest, the teachers of the law, nor the elders had the mind of God in their conception of Jesus.

John the Baptist’s Evaluative Point of View

John the Baptist’s evaluative point of view is revealed in his confrontation with the religious leaders (Matthew 3:7-12).^[45] For example, Matthew captures John’s graphic prediction of the Coming One in glowing terms: “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (3:11-12). The chaff represents the religious leaders (false prophets) who did not share God’s evaluative point of view.

Satan’s Evaluative Point of View

Following the baptismal scenario, even Satan acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God:

- The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread” (4:3).^[46]
- Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down” (4:5-6).

Satan expresses God’s point of view about Jesus, but he did not possess God’s point of view about Jesus’ purpose in coming (4:1-11). He did not think the things of God. It is in this vein that our Lord rebuked Peter for not having the mind of God concerning His death upon the cross (16:21-23).

Peter’s Evaluative Point of View

Peter’s evaluation of Jesus in 16:13-20 reflects God’s evaluative point of view in 3:17. Matthew highlights God’s point of view in the baptismal scene of Jesus. Apart from Matthew’s introduction—“Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John” [3:13]—one observes a dialogue between John and Jesus (3:14-15) and two revelatory events that follow (3:16-17). Following the baptism of Jesus, one hears the voice of God: “And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased’” (3:17). As stated above, after this acknowledgement by God, Matthew records Jesus’ encounter with Satan (4:1-11). It is quite evident that Satan did not deny what God stated, but he did not think the things of God. In other words, he sought to undermine God’s way of redemption. Later in Matthew’s story (16:21—28:20) when Peter tried to prevent the atonement, Jesus rebuked him, because, he, too, did not think the things of God: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men” (16:23). Surely, the implied reader must have reflected back upon the temptation scene of Jesus (4:1-12).

But Peter, prior to this rebuke, confessed the mind of God: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (16:16). Following this confession Jesus says, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven” (16:17). This statement by Jesus is also reminiscent of the baptismal scene in which God publicly declared Jesus to be His Son (3:17). Immediately after Jesus reveals His death, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John into the Mount of

Transfiguration. Once more, God enters the world of man and proclaims: ““This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”” (17:5).

SECOND MAJOR SECTION: 4:17—16:20

Following Matthew’s introduction to Jesus as Messiah (1:1—4:16), he embarks upon Jesus’ ministry to the nation of Israel (4:17—11:1). ^[47] Matthew calls attention to Jesus’ ministry with three passages that focus upon His teaching, preaching, and healing (4:23; 9:35; 11:1). Just as John began his ministry with a call to repentance, so did Jesus: “From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” (4:17). Jesus viewed the multitudes as sheep without a shepherd: “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (9:36). The leaders of Israel (false prophets) had become evil. This evil caused Jesus to respond with: “You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (12:34). This statement of Jesus is also an echo of John’s denunciation of the Pharisees and Sadducees who approached John: “But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance (3:7-8).

JESUS’ MINISTRY TO ISRAEL: 4:17—11:1

Jesus’ Teaching Ministry to Israel

In Jesus’ ministry to Israel, He rebukes the religious leaders for their refusal to discern the will of God for their lives (5:20), and He also summons the crowds to repent and believe the gospel (4:17; 4:23; 9:35; 11:1). After Jesus learns of John’s imprisonment, He returns to Galilee to continue His ministry to Israel (4:12). Later He leaves Nazareth and lives in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali (4:12-13). During this period of time, He proclaims the good news that the kingdom of heaven is near (4:17). On one occasion as Jesus walks by the Sea of Galilee, He calls Simon Peter and Andrew (brother of Peter) to follow Him (4:18-20); shortly thereafter, He also invites two other brothers (James and John) to follow Him (4:21-22). Following a number of miracles by Jesus (see chapters 8 and 9), Jesus calls Matthew to become one of His disciples (9:9-13). Then, in chapter 10, Matthew informs us that He calls all of His disciples unto Himself (10:1-4).

Following the call of His disciples, Matthew informs his readers that Jesus went throughout Galilee “Teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people” (4:23). It is significant that Matthew repeats these three activities in 9:35 and 11:1. The third summary of Jesus’ ministry only mentions two of the three deeds.

Matthew 4:23	Matthew 9:35	Matthew 11:1
Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.	Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.	After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.

As a result of these activities, His fame spread throughout Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across the Jordan (4:25). His healing ministry quickly spread all over Syria (4:24), and as a result of this healing ministry people flocked from all over the area to be healed. Matthew reports the events with these words:

News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him (4:24-25).

Immediately following this healing ministry, Jesus saw the crowds that accompanied Him and He went up on a mountain and began to teach His disciples (5:1—7:28). If one wants to understand what He taught (4:23), then one must read the Sermon on the Mount. In this Sermon, Jesus taught His disciples that repentance involves a call to responsibility. This Sermon is a direct refutation of the teachings and practices of the religious leaders (5:17-20). Following this teaching, Matthew gives a comment that is rather striking: “When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law” (7:28-29). Just as in the first section of Matthew’s story (1:1—4:16), the reader is once again alerted to the hypocrisy of the leaders of Israel. The battle is about to begin but does not really take hold with increased momentum until chapter 12.

This battle of friction was suggested beforehand in His exhortation concerning impending persecution by the religious leaders (5:10-13) whom He later described as false prophets (7:15). After the Beatitudes, Jesus further warns the disciples about inner motives for right behavior. Again Jesus alerts His listeners to the religious leaders: “For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven” (5:20). This statement by Jesus echoes John’s renunciation of the Pharisees (3:7) and the complicity of the teachers of the law with Herod (2:4).

Jesus, following His reference to the righteousness of the Pharisees and teachers of the law (scribes), pinpoints some of their teachings (5:21-48) and acts of piety (6:1-18). In calling attention to their teachings, He says, “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago” (5:21a), “But I tell you” (5:22). Jesus is not contradicting the law, but rather He is setting forth the true interpretation of the law. He is not nullifying the law; that is to say, He is not setting aside the requirements of the law. If Jesus is abolishing the law as advocated by many Christians, then this interpretation contradicts Jesus’ earlier statement:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven (5:17-19). ^[48]

Jesus’ Healing Ministry to Israel

Jesus’ ministry to Israel not only includes teaching, but His ministry also reached out to those that were sick physically (8:1—9:38). With the healing ministry of Jesus, Matthew’s readers are being prepared for the beginning of hostilities against Jesus. The skirmishes against Jesus are

foreshadowed in the first part of Matthew's story (1:1—4:16) and also Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount foretells the confrontations (5:10-12). After coming down from the mountain, Jesus engages in a healing ministry (chapters 8 and 9 record ten miracles). Matthew makes known that Jesus heals a leper (8:1-4), restores a paralyzed servant of a centurion (8:5-13), cures Peter's mother-in-law (8:14-15), and, later that evening, He casts out demons and heals all the sick (8:16-17). Not only does Matthew record therapeutic miracles, but he also tells about a non-therapeutic miracle, namely, the calming of the winds and the waves of the sea (8:23-27). Following the non-therapeutic miracle, Matthew discloses the healing of two demon-possessed men (8:28-34).

After these healings, Jesus entered a boat and returned to His own town (9:1). Upon His arrival, men of the city brought a paralytic to Him (9:2a). Instead of telling him to get up, Jesus simply says, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven" (9:2b). Matthew now introduces his readers to an indirect confrontation with Jesus by the teachers of the law. Again, one is reminded of the words of Jesus following His evaluation of the ethical behavior and teachings of the religious leaders: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (7:15). These teachers of the law do not openly confront Him about His statement on forgiveness, but as Matthew says, "At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, 'This fellow is blaspheming!'" (9:3). Suddenly in this ninth chapter, one witnesses conflict as it materializes. To illustrate, one should observe Matthew's telling of the story. He says that Jesus, "knowing their thoughts," said to them:

"Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home." And the man got up and went home. When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men (9:4-8).

Not only does the second section (4:17—16:20) of Part One (4:17-11:1) emphasize Jesus' ministry to Israel, but it also emphasizes the disciples' ministry to Israel. Jesus sends the twelve out to "Preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons" (10:7-8). Conspicuously absent is the command to teach. They were to perform, at least from the context, two aspects of ministry: (1) proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is near, and (2) perform miracles of healing.

Next in Chapter 10, one beholds bitter, antagonistic conflict on the horizon. By the end of this second discourse (the charge to the Apostles), one senses the trend toward warlike conflict toward Jesus by the religious leaders. In this chapter (10), Jesus again cautions them about the religious leaders as He did in the Sermon on the Mount (7:15). He says, "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (10:16). He also warns them to "Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues" (10:17). Jesus had earlier warned them about the reaction of people in general as well as the dangers of the religious leaders.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you (5:10-12).

Jesus' Preaching Ministry to Israel

As stated earlier, Jesus “went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people” (4:23). In 4:17, Matthew reports Jesus as saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” It is through this proclamation that Jews and Gentiles alike will be enjoined upon to decision. The question is: Will they repent and become followers of Jesus and enter the sphere of God’s gracious Rule, or will they refuse to enter God’s kingdom and live in the sphere of Satan’s Rules?

What does the “kingdom of heaven” mean? Does not this phrase simply call attention to the truth that God rules? Is the kingdom of heaven equivalent to someone saying the Rule of God, or God reigns? When John said, “the kingdom of heaven is near” (3:2), did he not denote that the kingdom is coming near, or is approaching? John, Jesus, and the Apostles were advancing the concept that God has drawn near. For Matthew, God draws near in the person of Jesus Messiah, the Son of God. Matthew reports that “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us” (1:23). And in 12:28, Matthew states Jesus’ announcement: “if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

The gospel of the kingdom is about Jesus Messiah, the Son of God. The gospel of the kingdom is clear: it is the good news about God’s way of salvation that is revealed in Jesus. The gospel is that which the angel announces to Joseph: “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (1:21). The gospel is simply good news about God’s way of salvation by grace through Jesus. Jesus sums up this good news in a conversation with Nicodemus:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God (John 3:16-21).

THE ELEMENT OF CONFLICT IN 4:17—11:1

The element of conflict does not dominate 4:17—11:1 (part “A”) as it does in 11:2—16:20 (part “B”). Part “A” of the second major section focuses more on the teaching, preaching, and healing (4:23; 9:35; 11:1) than it does on the friction between Jesus and the scrupulous leaders. Nevertheless, the reader still reads of hostility between Jesus and the religious leaders; in part “A” the reader is alerted to disunity between Jesus and the religious leaders in His healing of the paralytic (9:1-8). In this first section, one is led to count on battle. In 4:17—8:34 Matthew forewarns the reader that he is to anticipate conflict. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount warns the disciples about persecution (5:10-12), and He also describes the righteousness that falls short of what is necessary for entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven (5:20).

Jesus in His now-famous Sermon speaks of the acts of piety performed by religious leaders as being hypocritical in nature (6:1-18). Following this rebuke of the rigid leaders’ motives, then Matthew concludes the Sermon on the Mount with: “When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their

teachers of the law" (7:28-29). Finally, Matthew records Jesus' admiration of the centurion's faith (8:5-10) versus the lack of faith on the part of the leaders: "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (8:11-12).

Now in Chapter 9, the conflict that the readers have been led to anticipate shows its ugly face. It has now materialized; it is here, not in full bloom, but in bud. This conflict is not direct but indirect. Matthew carefully reveals that the charges brought against Him, following the healing of paralytic, were indirect: "At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming!" (9:3). They declare "to themselves," says Matthew. Following the call of Matthew into discipleship, the religious leaders observed Jesus having dinner with tax collectors and sinners in Matthew's home (9:9-10). The Pharisees objected to Jesus' behavior, but they did not question Jesus directly about His behavior but rather His disciples (9:11).

In Chapter 10, Jesus summons His disciples and delivers to them His missionary charge (10:1-15). In the conclusion of this missionary charge, Jesus immediately forewarns them of irreconcilable conflict between themselves and the people (10:16-39). Just as Jesus had warned them about false prophets (religious leaders) in the Sermon on the Mount (7:15), now Jesus warns them

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about "wolves" (the people) in His sending them out to preach and to heal (10:7,8,16).

In the first major section (4:1—4:16), Matthew presents Jesus as the main character of his story. He demonstrates that Jesus is aligned with God as His authoritative Son (3:17). Matthew discloses two evaluative points of view that forcefully stand out in this first section; namely, God's

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point of view that Jesus is His Son (3:17) and Satan's challenge to Jesus in this capacity (4:3, 6).

The secular and religious leaders in this part of the story are characterized as evil. Their evaluative point of view is an observation that is at odds with God's declaration. The religious leaders are not only set forth as aligned with Herod (2:1-6), but they are also set in opposition to John the Baptist

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who is supportive of Jesus (3:7-12). In this first section, one comes away with the recognition that neither Jesus nor the religious leaders are aware of each other. But, in spite of this lack of awareness, one, upon a closer reading, immediately grasps that the leaders' threat to Jesus is foreshadowed through Herod's plot to kill Jesus (2:3-6). Also one immediately grasps Jesus' eschatological judgment (Matthew 24 and 25) as foreshadowed through the prophecy of John the Baptist:

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?

Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (3:7-12).

As stated above, the second major section (4:17—16:20) of Matthew's story divides itself into two segments (4:17—11:1 and 11:2—16:20). The first division (part A), in this second major section, focuses on the ministry of Jesus to Israel and the second division's (part B) central point is on Israel's repudiation of Jesus. In the first division of this second section, Matthew's controlling emphasis appears to be Jesus' ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing (4:23; 9:35; 11:1), rather than on the

element of clash between Jesus and Israel (leaders and the people), though this element is still present. In this first section (part A) Jesus calls Israel to repentance and announces the Kingdom of Heaven (4:17). But in this second section (11:2—16:20) of the second major division (4:17—16:20), one observes Jesus' anguish of Israel's negative response to Jesus' call of repentance (11:16-19). In concluding this section about Jesus' ministry to Israel, one should observe that Matthew prepares the reader for the conflict that is about to begin.

ESCALATION OF CONFLICT BETWEEN JESUS AND THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN 11:1--16:20

In part “B” of the second major section, the leaders’ threat to kill Jesus escalates to the point of their plotting to rid themselves of Him (12:14). This plot is foreshadowed by their accusation of blasphemy in 9:3. But in this latter half (part B) of the second part of Matthew’s story, one observes an escalation of conflict. The religious leaders’ hostilities are no longer secretive (9:1-8), but their ill will is now one of direct confrontation over the disciples’ picking heads of grain on the Sabbath (12:2-8). Following this showdown, the Pharisees followed Him into *their* synagogues (12:9) seeking to find something to accuse Him of (12:10). The leaders are no longer hesitant to speak to Him directly. To illustrate consider the following encounters:

Matthew 12:9-10	Matthew 12:38
Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”	Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, “Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you.”

Also, the leaders do not mind criticizing His disciples to His face.

Matthew 12:2	Matthew 15:1-2
When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, “Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.”	Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!”

In this second subdivision (part B), one observes the intensity of controversy. Prior to this level of antagonism, interaction was to some extent avoided. But now controversy saturates this section. This is the pattern one detects in 12:2-8, 9-14, 38-45; 15:1-9. This passion of hatred is so great against Jesus that the religious leaders seek His life. Matthew captures this intense dislike with these words: “The Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus” (12:14). In this direct confrontation with Jesus, He twice speaks of eschatological judgment against these leaders (12:22-37, 38-45). Jesus speaks of judgment when they accuse Him of doing His miracles through the prince of demons (Beelzebub); second, He speaks of judgment when they refuse to believe and request another sign.

Jesus and Beelzebub Matthew 12:36-37	The Sign of Jonah Matthew 12:41-42
But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word	The men of Nineveh will stand up <u>at the</u> judgment <u>with</u> this generation and condemn it;

they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.

for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here.

These two judgments foreshadow the eschatological judgment that Jesus elaborates in Matthew 24 and 25. This judgment is the same “coming wrath” that John the Baptist forewarned the religious leaders about when they came to him for baptism (3:7-12): “His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (3:12). Jesus again alludes to this judgment in the Parable of the Weeds (13:36-43):

As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear (13:40-43).

As stated above, the religious leaders’ opposition with Jesus escalates. Following the attack against Jesus in Matthew 12, the demanding leaders plot how they might destroy Him (12:14). The critical leaders are presented to the reader as characters who are “evil” (12:23, 39, 45; 16:4), spiritually blind (12:24, 38, 42; 16:3), hypocritical (12:10; 15:7; 16:10), conniving (12:14), murderous (12:14), unfaithful to God (12:39; 16:4), unrepentant (12:41), and lawless (15:3, 6). In addition to the above, Jesus also likens them to a man possessed by a demon (12:43-45); and they are also pictured as acting in a manner representative of Satan (12:38; 16:1). These are the ones who Jesus warned His disciples about in the Sermon on the Mount (7:15).

Development of the Conflict

In this second major section (4:17—16:20), part B (11:2—16:20), one witnesses the escalation of conflict. The following is a chronological listing of the various encounters between Jesus and the religious leaders:

- 12:1-8 Plucking Grain on the Sabbath
- 12:9-14 Healing of the Man with a Withered Hand
- 12:22-37 Healing Bind and Dumb Demoniac
- 12:38-45 Demand for a Sign
- 15:1-20 Eating with Defiled Hands
- 16:1-4 Second Demand for a Sign
- 16:5-12 The Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees

These seven encounters demonstrate the hatred that the religious leaders exhibited toward Jesus. Even with the miracles, they were not persuaded as to the true identity of Jesus. Part B of the second major section is about the repudiation of Jesus’ ministry to Israel. As stated in the first major

section (1:1—4:16), the identity of Jesus is presented with the climax in God's announcement of who Jesus really is: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (3:17).

Entwined with the motif of repudiation in 11:2—16:20 is also the speculation about the identity of Jesus. The questioning begins with John the Baptist: "When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'" (11:2-3). Even the crowds question one another: "Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. All the people were astonished and said, 'Could this be the Son of David?'" (12:22-23).

CONFICTING VIEWS ABOUT THE IDENTITY OF JESUS

As mentioned above, Matthew presented the various viewpoints about Jesus in 1:1—4:16. But in this second part, one is also confronted even more pointedly than in the first part as to the identity of Jesus. It is significant that God in Part One (4:1—4:16), as well as in part two (4:17—16:20), breaks into the world of Matthew with His evaluative point of view about Jesus (3:17; 17:5). This identity of Jesus also permeates, in greater detail, the third section (16:21—28:20). This identity is of such a controversial nature that Jesus even asked the disciples what people were saying about who the Son of Man is (16:13).

As a result of Jesus' widespread activity of teaching, preaching, and healing, His fame spreads throughout Palestine and even Syria (4:23-25; 9:36, 31, 33, 35; 11:2, 4; 13:54; 14:1). But in spite all of this fame, one still observes conflicting views about the true identity of Jesus of Nazareth. The reaction to Jesus is mixed. For example, the crowds follow Him (4:24-25; 8:1, 10; 9:33; 12:15; 13:2; 14:13; 15:30-31), but, on the other hand, the religious leaders place Him under scrutiny (9:3, 11, 34). In spite of His fame, in spite of His teaching, in spite of His preaching, and, in spite of His healing, nevertheless, Israel, as a whole, repudiates Him (11:2—12:50). The religious leaders and the crowds do not recognize His true identity.

Towns in Galilee

This conflict is not surprising to Matthew's readers because they had been forewarned (2:3; 3:7-12; 9:3, 11, 14, 34; 10:5-42). Jesus was amazed at the unbelief of so many in their rejection of Him. Jesus renounces the people for their turning away from John and especially Himself (11:16-19). Jesus issues condemnation on the cities of Korazin, Bethsaida (11:20-21), and Capernaum (11:23-24) for their unwillingness to be moved to repentance following His mighty miracles. Even the townspeople of Nazareth were astonished at the teaching of Jesus: "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things? And they took offense at him" (13:55-57a).

Herod Antipas

Herod Antipas, having heard news about Jesus, speculates about Him: "At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus, and he said to his attendants, 'This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him'" (14:1-2). Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, inherited Galilee and Perea as his kingdom. He is the one that had previously beheaded John the Baptist at the request of his wife's daughter Herodias (14:3-11). He did not possess the mind of God as to who Jesus really is.

Disciples of Jesus

But in contrast to all these, the disciples having been caught in a storm, watching Jesus walk on water, seeing Peter saved from drowning, and witnessing the calming of the sea (14:24-33), they all proclaimed: “Truly you are the Son of God.” (14:33). This correct response is the answer to an earlier question that they had asked when Jesus calms a storm: “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!” (8:27). Matthew concludes this second major section with two evaluative points of view which he juxtaposes to each other in order to bring his story to a culmination—Peter’s confession near Caesarea Philippi (16:13-20): “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (16:16). Peter’s point of view is correct because it is in alignment with God’s point of view (3:17; 16:23a). On the other hand, the evaluative viewpoint of the various segments of the Jewish nation is that He is just one of the prophets (16:13-14).

In the second part (4:17—16:20), Matthew tells of Jesus’ ministry to Israel (4:17—11:1) and of Israel’s response to Him (11:2—16:20). Through His ministry, Jesus summons Israel to repentance and to live in the sphere of God’s end-time rule (5:1—8:1). Despite His plea for restoration and acceptance of Himself as the Son of God, some charged Him with blasphemy (9:3). This section consists mainly of Jesus’ teaching, preaching, and healing (4:23; 9:35; 11:1).

In the later part of Matthew’s story, one observes a change (11:2—16:20). To all intents and purposes, Jesus’ ministry is without success. In fact, Israel’s response to His ministry is one of repudiation. The religious leaders attack Jesus Himself over the traditions of the elders and seek His life (12:1—8, 9—14; 15:1-9). The leaders dismiss Him outright as an agent of Satan (9:34; 12:24). The Jewish crowds look upon Him as another prophet (16:13-14).

In contrast to both the crowds and the leaders, the disciples confess Him to be the Messiah Son of God (16:16; 14:33). Still, despite the correctness of their confession, Jesus commands them to silence; they do not yet fully understand that the central task before Him is death upon a cross. Israel is ignorant as to who Jesus is, but the disciples know Him to be the Son of God. Jesus’ ministry is without success, at least according to the religious leaders and the crowds. But, on the other hand, His ministry, in the sight of God, is successful because He accomplished redemption for the sins of the world.

THIRD MAJOR SECTION: 16:21—28:20

The Journey to Jerusalem

Matthew begins Section Three with Jesus’ prediction about His ultimate fate (crucifixion) by the religious leaders. He writes, “From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life” (Matthew 16:21). One observes that in this explanation of His impending death, Jesus sets forth the concept that His death is necessary (“he must go” or “it is necessary,” *dei’*). God and Jesus intend this death for the salvation of all humanity (1:21), but, on the other hand, the religious leaders’ objective is destruction (12:14). Matthew employs the passion-prediction as another literary device to give cohesion to the third part of his story. He records three references to Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection (16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19).

Prior to these predictions, one recalls Peter’s confession about Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God (16:16). Following this confession, Jesus warned the disciples “not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.” One reason for this silence was that the disciples still did not understand the full mission of Jesus. Again, following the transfiguration of Jesus, the three disciples—Peter, James, and John—were told: “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead” (17:9).

The disciples still did not understand that Jesus had to die for the sins of the world. After Jesus' first announcement about His death, Peter immediately rebuked Jesus: "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" (16:22). Peter still did not understand the atonement. Jesus then reprimanded Peter for not thinking the "things of God," but rather the "things of men": "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (16:23). The readers of Matthew's Gospel would naturally reflect upon Jesus' temptation in the wilderness when Satan also sought to frustrate the scheme of God: "Away from me, Satan!" (4:10). Peter's evaluative point of view did not coincide with that of God's.

Subsequent to this rebuke by Jesus, one finds three of Jesus' disciples with Him on the Mountain. In the transfiguration of Jesus, God gives His viewpoint concerning the identity of His Son and the necessity of the death of His Son. Earlier, it is recalled that God entered into the world as actor and gave His testimony. Matthew records this intervention: "And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (3:17). In this second revelation of God's point of view, He adds an additional statement: "Listen to him!" (17:5). On the way back to Jerusalem, as stated above, Jesus informs the disciples of His impending death (16:21), but Peter says "no" (16:22). But on the Mount, God says, "Listen to Him!" They were to listen to His warnings about His impending death (16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19).

Following the confession of Peter in Caesarea Philippi and the Mount of Transfiguration scene, Jesus and His disciples enter Galilee. Upon entering this territory, Jesus for the second time tells them of His impending death: "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life" (17:22-23). One can still hear the echo of God's voice: "Listen to Him!" They were to receive that which God had ordained—suffering and death in Jerusalem. Yet, the disciples still would not understand the implications of this death until after the resurrection: "As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, 'Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead'" (17:9). The disciples did not fully understand these events until Jesus met with them after the resurrection and explained the "things of God":

He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:44-48).

When Jesus completed His work in this area (Galilee), He started toward Jerusalem (Matthew 20:17). He took the disciples apart privately and, again for the third time explained the "things of God": "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!" (20:18-19).

From the border of Jericho, Jesus journeys in the direction of Jerusalem and arrives at the Mount of Olives (21:1). The events that now transpire are shrouded in the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Israel receives Jesus into Jerusalem as the Son of David (21:9). When the inhabitants of Jerusalem inquired of the crowds as to who this Jesus is, the people replied: "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee" (21:11). This confession of the crowds is similar to the remarks of the disciples concerning the identity of Jesus as reported by the people: "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." To the people, Jesus

is no more than a prophet, even though they spoke of Him as the Son of David. Israel still did not understand God's evaluative viewpoint about Jesus.

Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem marked the beginning of the end of His conflict with the religious leaders. His actions caused the religious leaders to engage Him in direct confrontation over His course of actions. Jesus attacked the seat of their power: "My house will be called a house of prayer," but you are making it a 'den of robbers'" (21:13). Jesus launches a massive assault upon their authority and integrity (21:12-13). This action paves the way for the thorny controversies with the religious leaders leading up to His crucifixion. As Jesus debates and speaks in parables, the tension between Him and the religious leaders reach a breaking point (21:12—23:39).

The confrontation with Jesus widens to the point that it includes representatives of all the groups in Jerusalem:

- Chief priests and the scribes (21:15)
- Chief priests and the elders of the people (21:23)
- The disciples of the Pharisees along with the Herodians (22:15-16)
- The Sadducees (22:23)
- A lawyer from the Pharisees (22:24-35)
-

Following these confrontational episodes, Jesus Himself closes the series by challenging the Pharisees:

"What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" "The son of David," they replied. He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, "'The Lord said to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.'" If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions (22:42-46)

After Jesus silences the leaders in debate, then the religious leaders leave the scene of the temple. Alone with the crowds and the disciples, He delivers a piercing chastisement against the religiosity of the religious leaders. This scathing rebuke is reminiscent of His stern disapproval of the sanctimonious leaders in His Sermon on the Mount: "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (5:20).

Jesus begins His ministry with an analysis of their teachings and ends His ministry with another stinging condemnation of their ethical behavior. Jesus issues seven woes directed against their conduct (chapter 23). Following this indictment of the rigid leaders for their shallow display of piety, He then proceeds to speak of God's judgment upon the nation of Israel (chapter 24). This entire chapter is about God's eschatological judgment upon the nation, upon the unscrupulous shepherds, and upon the temple. He then speaks three parables—The Parable of the Ten Virgins, The Parable of the Talents, and The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats—against the over-bearing leaders of Israel for their pretense of virtue (chapter 25).

After concluding these three parables of judgment, Jesus again brings to the attention of His disciples the impending death that awaits Him by the chief priest and elders of the people (26:1-5). The leaders demonstrate their rejection of His parables by their plotting to put Him to death. The corrupt leaders rejected God's identity of Jesus Messiah as His Son (3:17; 17:5). Their evaluative viewpoint is not the "things of God," but rather, the "things of men."

Jesus now informs His disciples, after their request about the Passover, that it is time to prepare the Passover meal (26:1). It is during this meal that Jesus gives a glimmer of information as

to what His death is all about: “Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (26:27-28). Following this Supper, the political machinery starts to roll in its intensity for His crucifixion. Immediately upon His arrest, He is taken before the Sanhedrin (26:57-67), before Pilate (27:11-26), and then the soldiers mock Jesus (27:27-31). Matthew then describes in accelerated movement the events of the crucifixion (27:32-44), the death of Jesus (27:45-55), the burial of Jesus (27:57-66), the resurrection of Jesus (28:1-10), the guards’ report (28:11-15), and finally the instructions of Jesus to His disciples about making disciples (28:16-20).

CONCLUSION

The third major division of Matthew’s Gospel (16:21-28:20) is honeycombed with confrontations with the religious leaders. Beginning with Matthew 16:21, one observes an escalation of the “powers that be” to get rid of Jesus. The religious leaders are so cunning in their attack against Jesus that even the crowds are taken in by their hypocrisy (27:20). No wonder Jesus warned His disciples on two different occasions to “Watch out for false prophets” (Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24). The first warning followed Jesus’ rebuke of the religious leaders’ theology (Matthew 5—6) and the second and third warnings occurred following His seven woes (Matthew 23) against the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. The false prophets in the Gospel of Matthew refer, so it appears, to the religious leaders. Throughout the ministry of Jesus, He scrutinizes the unethical behavior of the leaders. Conflict with the leaders of Israel permeates the whole of Matthew’s Gospel.

Chapter 4 analyzed the three major divisions in the Gospel of Matthew. Throughout the three sections (4:1—1:16; 4:17—16:20; 16:21—28:20) of Matthew’s gospel, the identity of Jesus permeates all three divisions. In these three divisions, one observes that conflict abounds from the beginning to end. To begin with, Matthew foreshadows this disunity but in the ministry of John the Baptist, one observes direct confrontation. Jesus begins His ministry with an analysis of the religious leaders’ concept of God’s righteousness, and He concludes His ministry with His analysis of the religious leaders’ characteristics (chapter 24 and 25). The antagonism of the leaders of Israel against Jesus begins in the second major section. But in Part A one observes, not direct confrontation, but indirect confrontation. On the other hand, in Part B one observes an escalation of the quarrels with Jesus by the leaders—it is now direct. In the third major section 16:21—28:20), this animosity against Jesus reaches its climax on the part of the leaders in the crucifixion of Jesus.

Chapter 5 will analyze the false prophets passages in Matthew 24 in order to understand more fully who the false prophets were that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 7:15 and 24:11, 24. This chapter heightens an awareness of why Jesus warned the disciples to beware of false prophets. An investigation of His last controversy with the religious leaders will drive home the point that the false prophets were the religious leaders that Jesus dealt with in His ministry—leaders who were corrupt through and through. In fact, they were spoken of as evil, a brood of vipers, children of hell, unmerciful, judgmental, wicked, adulterous, insincere, hypocritical, unrepentant, unbelieving, lacking in righteousness, lawless, legalistic, insensitive, murderous, and opposed to God’s point of view about the identity of Jesus.

[1]

Mark Allen Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 99.

[2]

See Ronald David Witherup, “The Cross of Jesus: A Literary-Critical Study of Matthew 27,” (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1985), 56, where he comments on an important methodology of literary criticism.

Contemporary literary criticism accepts the object of its study as literature in and of itself, not as a means to an end. As opposed to the other Biblical criticisms, there is no intention to look behind the text to discern history or sources. Literary criticism looks at a text, rather than through it. To use Murray Krieger's apt metaphor, the text is to be viewed not as a "window" through which one looks to discern what is on the other side; rather, it is a "Mirror" and the meaning of the text is thus on "this side" of the reading experience.

^[3] Ibid., 95.

^[4] Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24.

^[5] John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1987), 75.

^[6] Powell, *Criticism*, 1-10.

^[7] Ibid., 7.

^[8] Ibid.

^[9] See Chapter 2, "The Crisis and Identification of False Prophets Within the Churches of Christ," for examples of not applying the principles of literary analysis in seeking to comprehend the false prophets passages. And, as a result of this loose interpretation, each division within the Churches of Christ claims the false prophets citations as their own exclusive ticket to defend their separation from other Christians.

^[10] See M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 6th ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993), 269, where he says,

Iser distinguishes between the "implied reader," who is established by the text itself as one who will respond in specific ways to the "response-inviting structures" of the text, and the "actual reader," whose responses are inevitably colored by his or her accumulated private experiences.

^[11] An example of this distinction is found in Appendix VI—The Passover Traditions in the First Century—where the *real reader* goes to outside sources to discover what the *implied reader* already knows about the Passover traditions in the first century. See Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism*, 19-21.

^[12] Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 149-150; Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1974); David Robert Bauer, "The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Literary-Critical Examination," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1985), 24-26; Dorothy Jean Weaver, "The Missionary Discourse in the Gospel of Matthew: A Literary Critical Analysis," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1987), 66.

^[13] See W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1982), where he counsels Christians not to reject literary criticism.

Religious thinkers should be sympathetic to criticism because it is a branch of philosophy; it is an effort to get at certain truths about signs, knowledge, and reality. If these remarks seem at all platitudinous, let me add that I have taken the trouble to make them because it seems to me possible for the thought and scholarship of religious persons (especially in America today) to be too far sold in the cultivation of certain merely historical, informational, and neutral techniques. This may have been for a time a necessary phase of competition with secular science and secular education. But there is no reason why Christians should be the

last (or even be slow) to transcend the limitations of such knowledge, to outgrow pedantic misconceptions and participate in literary philosophy.

[\[14\]](#) See Witherup, “Cross of Jesus,” 120, 139.

[\[15\]](#) Chatman, *Story*, 19-27.

[\[16\]](#) Ibid., 19.

[\[17\]](#) Jack Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 3.

[\[18\]](#) Ibid.

[\[19\]](#) See also Bauer, “The Cross of Jesus,” 62.

[\[20\]](#) E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1927), 30.

[\[21\]](#) Chatman, *Story*, 19, 26.

[\[22\]](#) Kathleen Morner and Ralph Rausch, “Plot” in *NTC’s Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Chicago: NTC/Contemporary Publishing Company, 1997), 167.

[\[23\]](#) See Dorothy Jean Weaver, “The Missionary Discourse in the Gospel of Matthew: A Literary Critical Analysis,” (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1987), where she summarizes quite succinctly the story, plot and setting: “This story can be viewed in terms of three basic elements: characters (the actors in the story), plot (the sequence of events within the story), and setting (the designated location or surroundings within which any given event of the story takes place).

[\[24\]](#) Forster, *Novel*, 86.

[\[25\]](#) See Bauer, “Structure,” 26, where he comments on “plot”:

Another aspect of literary criticism which has received a great deal of attention lately is the “plot.” Put succinctly, the plot is the arrangement of incidents within the narrative, considered in light of their relations to one another. A distinction is usually made between the arrangement of events in the narrative time and that in the story time to which the narrative refers. The narrative may include such devices as flash back or foreshadowing, forcing the readers to place the incidents thus described in their proper temporal position within the story.

[\[26\]](#) See also Morner and Rausch, *NTC’s Dictionary*, 168.

[\[27\]](#) Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Story*, 43.

[\[28\]](#) Ibid., 34.

[\[29\]](#) Powell, *Criticism*, 23; See also Weaver, “Discourse,” 67.

[30]

For an excellent treatment of the various evaluative points of view in Matthew's Gospel, see Kingsbury, *Story*, 1988), 33-37; Morner and Rausch, *NTC's Dictionary*, "Point of View," 170-171; M. H. Abrams, "Point of View," *Literary Terms*, 165-169. See also Mark Allen Powell, "The Religious Leaders in Matthew: A Literary-Critical Approach," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1988), 176-184.

[31]

See Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 76-86; Weaver, "Discourse," 68-100; Kingsbury, *Story*, 33-42.

[32]

Powell, "Leaders," 184.

[33]

I am indebted to Kingsbury's book, *Matthew as Story*, for calling my attention to this threefold structure. This overview of Matthew's structure follows the development by Kingsbury. See also Powell, "Leaders," 39-41; Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 112-150; David Robert Bauer, "The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Literary-Critical Examination," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1985).

[34]

Kingsbury, *Story*, 43-58.

[35]

This second section may be further divided into two subdivisions: (1) Ministry of Jesus to Israel [4:17—11:1]; and (2) Israel's repudiation of Jesus [11:2—16:20]; Witherup, *The Cross of Jesus*, 34; Bauer, "Structure," 185.

[36]

Kingsbury, *Story*, 77-93.

[37]

For an analysis of the structure of Matthew, see Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 142, 152.

[38]

Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 89.

[39]

Weaver, "Discourse," 62.

[40]

Kingsbury, *Story*, 98.

[41]

For an excellent commentary on God entering the world as actor, see Weaver, "Discourse," 90; Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 124.

[42]

See Kingsbury, *Story*, 35.

[43]

"When Abram was ninety nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.' Abram fell face down, and God said to him, 'As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God'" (Genesis 17:1-8).

[44]

See Kingsbury, *Story*, 48-49.

[45]

See Kingsbury, *Story*, 49-51, for an insightful analysis of the Baptist's point of view.

[46]

In the Greek New Testament there are many kinds of conditional statements. There are four classes of conditional sentences that are outstanding in usage. The first class condition, the one employed by Satan, affirms the reality of the condition. It is expressed by *ei* ("if") with the indicative mood in the protasis (if clause) and almost any

mood or tense in the apodosis (main or fulfillment clause). This interpretation is required according to Greek syntax. Whenever the indicative with *ei* ("if" clause) is employed instead of the subjunctive with *ean* ("if" clause), then, one must assume the truth of the protasis (if clause). This construction confirms the condition and is best translated "Since you are the Son of God. . . ."

[47] See Kingsbury, *Story*, 59-76.

[48] For a detailed study of the Old Testament and its relevance, see Dallas Burdette, "The Authority of the Old Testament: A Brief Summary of the Relevance of the Old Testament within the Christian Community" [ON-LINE]. Available from <http://www.freedominchrist.net> [accessed 16 February 1999], located under caption BIBLICAL STUDIES and then under the subheading MISAPPLIED SCRIPTURES.

[49] Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Story*,

[50] Powell, "Leaders," 217.

[51] Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

IDENTIFICATION OF FALSE PROPHETS IN MATTHEW 24

The first reason one needs to learn *how* to interpret is that, whether one likes it or not, every reader is at the same time an interpreter. That is, most of us assume as we read that we also understand what we read. We also tend to think that *our understanding* is the same thing as the Holy Spirit's or human author's *intent*. However, we invariably bring to the text all that we are, with all of our experiences, culture, and prior understandings of words and ideas. Sometimes what we bring to the text, unintentionally to be sure, leads us astray, or else causes us to read all kinds of foreign ideas into the text.^[11]

FALSE PROPHETS IN MATTHEW 24

This chapter seeks to understand the context of the last two occurrences of the phrase “false prophets” as employed by Jesus. As one reads through the Matthean account, one quickly discovers that Jesus employs the phrase “false prophets” only three times. This word group only occurs four other times in the New Testament.^[2] The wording is always used in reference to those who lead people away from God. This chapter develops a brief scenario of Jesus’ confrontations with the religious leaders in Matthew 21-23 in order to establish a background for a correct interpretation of the false prophets’ texts in Matthew 24:11, 24.

It is significant that these two citations follow Christ’s last controversy with the religious leaders (Matthew 21:18—23:39).^[3] Since this utterance about false prophets appears frequently in our religious journals,^[4] it is necessary to continue to analyze this declaration in the various contexts to see how Jesus employed the expression and to whom.^[5] Of the three occurrences of this construction in Matthew, one discovers that Jesus is the only one who employs this phrase. The first mentioning of this phrase “false prophets” had reference to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. The second and third occurrences of this word group are found in chapter 24 that reveals a number of signs concerning the end of apostate Jerusalem along with its temple. This reference to false prophets not only relates to ethical behavior but also to a denial of Jesus as the Messiah.

Jesus in His description of the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 warns His people against those who would appear as God’s Anointed One (Christ) and claim to be true prophets. Jesus, after enumerating kingdom behavior, summarizes by saying, “At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people” (24:11), and “At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or, ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible” (24:23-24).

To set the stage for an accurate identification of Jesus’ false prophets in Matthew 24, it is necessary to go back to the events leading up to Jesus’ admonition. Since words do not stand alone, then one must consult the events leading up to the use of certain words in order to grasp fully the author’s intended meaning. Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez capture this truth and state it succinctly.

Most of us assume that if we wish to know what a word means, a look in the dictionary will answer our question. Obviously, this is true as far as definitions are concerned. But as to what is communicated by that word, we need to look at more than the dictionary. Words do not stand alone. They are spoken by one person and addressed to another. [6]

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO MATTHEW 24

The First Major Controversy

The first major controversy with the religious leaders occurs in Matthew 9. In this chapter, Jesus rebukes the leaders of Israel for their “insincerity.” Jesus had just performed a number of miracles (chapter 8): for instance, [1] He healed a man with leprosy (8:1-4); [2] He healed the centurion’s servant (8:5-13); [3] He healed Peter’s mother-in-law and cast out demons and healed all the sick (8:14-17); [4] He calmed the storm (8:28-34); [5] He healed two demon-possessed men (8:28-34); and, finally, He healed a paralytic (9:1-2).

As a result of these miracles, the leaders of Israel reacted negatively toward His healing ministry. Immediately following the healing of the paralytic (9:1-2), Jesus reacted strongly toward their inner thoughts. Matthew writes: “At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, ‘This fellow is blaspheming!’” (9:3). Notice that this accusation of blasphemy was not verbalized but remained within their own evil minds. But Jesus looked into the inner recesses of their depraved minds and said, “Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?” (9:4). For the first time in Matthew’s gospel, the religious leaders and Jesus have direct contact. These controversies foreshadowed the final significant debate that Jesus had with the leaders of Israel. Jesus’ ministry began with conflict and ended with conflict.

The Last Major Controversy

This last argument took place during the last week of Jesus’ ministry. The following is a brief summary of the events that transpired during Jesus’ final week:

- The Triumphal Entry (21:1-11)
- The Cleansing of the Temple (21:12-17)
- The Last Controversies with the Jewish Leaders (21:18—23:39)
- The Olivet Discourse concerning the End of the Age (chapters 24-25)
- The Anointing of Jesus’ Feet (26:11-13)
- The Arrest, Trials, and Death of Jesus (26:14—27:66)
- The Resurrection (chapter 28)

During this final week (Passion Week), the hostilities with the religious leaders escalate (chapters 21-23), and then they put Him to death (chapters 26-27). These leaders continue to see themselves as the lawful leaders of Israel and at the same time the legitimate interpreters of Scripture and the official holders of their religious heritage or traditions. Chapter 21 narrates [1] Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem (21:1-11), [2] Jesus at the temple (21:12-17), and [3] the withering of the fig tree (21:18-22). It was then, according to Matthew, that the chief priest and elders questioned the authority of Jesus: “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?” (21:23).

Again, as in His earlier major encounter with the religious leaders, He exposes them for their hypocrisy. To begin with, Jesus questioned them about the origin of John's baptism (21:24-27). In their response, they revealed their true character in the same way that they had manifested when they went out to hear John the Baptist preach in the wilderness (3:7-10). Prior to this last great controversy (chapters 21-23), Jesus had previously, according to the apostle John, brought to their attention two facts: [1] that their existence did not originate in God, and [2] that their allegiance belonged to Satan (John 8:13, 44). Matthew, too, records the head-on clash that led to Jesus' allegations (Matthew 21-22). Following the narration of this clash, Matthew gives the reaction of the religious leaders concerning Jesus' parables: "When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them" (21:45).⁴⁶ Matthew further informs his readers that "they looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet" (21:46).

Earlier, in the beginning of His ministry, the disciples of Jesus had cautioned Jesus about His remarks against the Pharisees.

Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?" He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit" (15:12-14).

This final controversy with the religious leaders was not something new with Jesus. The climax of Jesus' ministry concludes with his final denunciation of these false prophets. Matthew once more as he brings to an end his gospel opens this discourse of controversy with Jesus' questioning these evil leaders. For example, He interrogates these insincere men about John's baptism, as stated above, and after their refusal to answer His question about John's baptism (21:24-27), He responds with three parables that condemn these dishonest leaders: [1] The Parable of the Two Sons (21:28-32); [2] The Parable of the Tenants (21:33-46); and [3] The Parable of the Wedding Banquet (22:1-11). [7]

The Parable of the Two Sons

"What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'" 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. "Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. "Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him (21:28-32).

In the Parable of the Two Sons (21:28-32), He rebukes them for their refusal to change their minds and believe, even though they had seen God at work in Him. As one reads Matthew's narrative of the events, one cannot help but wonder if his readers did not reflect upon these same leaders in the prologue to his gospel when he wrote:

When he [Herod] had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for

this is what the prophet has written: ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel’” (2:4-6).

This Parable of the Two Sons is a slap-in-the-face against the false prophets in Matthew 24—and they knew it. Following this parable, Jesus presented another parable—The Parable of the Tenants.

The Parable of the Tenants

Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. “The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said. “But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. “Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.” Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:” ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’? “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.” When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet (21:33-46).

In this second parable (21:33-46), Jesus demonstrates that the leaders of Israel failed to meet their responsibilities to God (21:34-36). Even when God sent His Son, they rejected Him (21:37-40). With these parables, Jesus places the religious leaders in the history of rejection of God’s Anointed One. God is now giving the vineyard to those who will accept Jesus (21:41-44). Matthew makes known to his readers that the leaders knew that these three parables were spoken against them (21:45). Instead of repentance, the leaders looked for a way to arrest Him (21:46). These leaders are the false prophets of Matthew 24. Once more, Jesus presented another parable to draw attention to their rejection of the One whom God sent—The Parable of the Wedding Banquet.

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. “Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’ “But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was

enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless. “Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ “For many are invited, but few are chosen” (22:1-18).

In this third parable (22:1-18), Jesus makes the same point about the relationship of the religious leaders and God’s kingdom. This parable is a direct rebuke against the leaders. The major themes of this parable are: [1] The king prepares a wedding banquet (22:2); [2] those invited find excuses not to attend and, then kill those sent with invitations (22:3-6); [3] the king responds by destroying their

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city as punishment (Jesus develops this more fully in Matthew 24) and invites outsiders to attend (22:8-10); and [4] the leaders are warned that if they do not dress properly, then they will be thrown out (22:11-14). Over and again, Jesus nails the coffin shut on these false teachers in Matthew 24.

THE CONSPIRACY OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Now, four scenes follow these parables in which various combinations of the religious leaders combine their efforts to defeat and to put an end to this supposed troublemaker (22:15-22). The various sects combined their efforts to work together in order to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the people. Immediately following the Parable of the Wedding Banquet, one observes the Pharisees and the Herodians in a clandestine operation to try to entrap Him. Matthew preserves this undercover operation for the extermination of Jesus.

Pharisees and Herodians

Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. “Teacher,” they said, “we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, “Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?” “Caesar’s,” they replied. Then he said to them, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away (22:15-22).

The first scene combines the Pharisees and the Herodians. These two groups schemed together to try to silence Him. They tried to lay a trap for Him over the payment of taxes to Caesar (22:15-16). Insincerity controls this pericope. In this showdown, Jesus calls these religious leaders hypocrites (v. 18). Why did He call them hypocrites? Matthew informs his readers that Jesus knew “their evil intent” (v. 18). In the next scene, one observes the extreme insincerity of the Sadducees in questioning Him about marital relationships after the resurrection.

Sadducees

That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. “Teacher,” they said, “Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him. Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. Finally, the woman died. Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?” Jesus replied, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.” When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching (22:23-33).

The second scene embraces the Sadducees questioning Him about marriage at the resurrection (22:23-33)—they did not believe in the resurrection (22:23). They were spiritually blind in their understanding of the Scriptures (22:29-31); they were also spiritually blind in that they did not understand the power of God (22:29). Again, one recognizes an underhanded manipulation to catch Him in an entanglement that they imagined was hopeless to escape. But they failed just as their cohorts efforts also misfired in their attempt to try to get Him in hot water with the people or with the authorities. In the next episode, one looks at an expert in the law trying his hand.

A Pharisee: An Expert in the Law

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: ” ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (22:34-40).

The third episode involves their efforts to entrap Him over the greatest commandment in the law (22:34-35). Jesus knew that the Pharisees were devious, sly, dishonest, foxy, crooked and shrewd; He knew that this question was to test Him. Thus, Jesus in response to their question also asked them a question about who Christ is.

Pharisees

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” “The son of David,” they replied. He said to them, “How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him ‘Lord’? For he says, ” ‘The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.”’ If then David calls him ‘Lord,’ how can he be his son?” No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions. (22:41-46).

The fourth incident embodies the gathering together of the Pharisees. Jesus took advantage of this occasion and asked them to answer the question: “What do you think about the Christ? Whose

son is he?" (22:42), but they refused to answer (22:41-45). The religious leaders abandon their attempt to show that He posed a theological threat to their traditions through His exposition to the law. As one reflects upon the question Jesus asked the Pharisees, surely the readers of this gospel must have recalled this same question to the apostles (16:13-20). During His conflict (21:18—23:39), Jesus goes to the very heart of their problems: "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God" (22:29).

SEVEN WOES AGAINST THE LEADERS OF ISRAEL

Following this final conflict with the religious leaders, Jesus summarizes their many faults and addresses them as "hypocrites" and "blind guides" (chapter 23). In His brief explanation of the leaders, He warns His disciples to obey them, not to copy them: "So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach" (23:3).

Matthew 23 details one of the most graphic descriptions available in all of Scripture about the decadence of Israel's leaders. Jesus issues seven woes against the religious leaders (23:13-33). Before enunciating the seven woes, He, like a bolt of lightning, goes to the very core of their corrupt nature:

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"Everything they do is done for men to see" (23:5). The seven woes announced by Jesus are devastating to these leaders. These seven Scripture citations are included in this chapter so that the reader may follow the context of Matthew 24:11, 24 in order to ascertain, beyond the shadow of a doubt, as to whom Jesus had in mind when He spoke of false prophets. The following is His stinging condemnation of the false prophets issued in seven woes:

1. "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to (23:13-14).
2. "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are" (23:15).
3. "Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.' You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it (23:16-22).
4. "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel (23:23-24).

5. “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean (23:25-26).
6. “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness (23:27-28).
7. “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous” (23:29; full text is 23:29-39).

In this conversation against the religious leaders, Jesus castigates them as “blind” five times (22:16, 17, 19, 24, 26) and as “hypocrites” six times (23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29). They did not understand the important things in God’s revelation. These leaders did not go for inner purity but were content with externals (23:23, 27-28). They were faultless in their observance of their rituals, but they were short on “justice, mercy and faithfulness” (23:23). This inner decay was so rampant among the religious leaders that Jesus issued His scathing attack against their unethical behavior. Jesus confronted these leaders head-on in their full-fledged, legalistic, ritualistic, and hair-splitting teachings (23:15). Consider the following judgments voiced by Jesus in His reaction to the religious leaders’ hypocrisy:

- Brood of vipers! (23:33)
- Lawless (23:23, 28)
- Extortionist (23:25)
- Self-indulgent (23:25)
- Hypocrites (23:28)
- Abusive (23:34)
- Murderous (23:34-35)

Jesus’ castigation of the above leaders’ unethical behavior is not the whole story. In fact, they enter into a conspiracy with other leaders in order to bring about the death of Jesus. For instance, Matthew concludes his gospel with a reference to this conspiracy on the part of the leaders to eliminate Jesus.

Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him. “But not during the Feast,” they said, “or there may be a riot among the people” (26:3-4) (emphasis mine).

Matthew portrays the stealth employed by the so-called religious leaders to bring about the crucifixion of Jesus. They themselves do not openly arrest Jesus, but rather they employed Judas for this clandestine operation (26:14-16). Next, observe how they hid behind the crowd that they sent to arrest Him (26:47). Then, even in the trial they employed false testimony and false witnesses to gain conviction (26:59-60). Again, they also accused Jesus of blasphemy in order to give credence to their condemnation of Him (26:65-68). Once again, while Jesus was on the cross, they mocked Him

(27:41-43). And finally, they even went so far as to try to frustrate the resurrection by sealing and guarding the tomb (27:62-66).

CONCLUSION

Throughout the gospel of Matthew, the religious leaders are presented in a very unfavorable light. They rejected God's point of view about His Son. They acted without authority from God. Jesus acknowledges that they have no God-given mandate to lead the children of Israel; in fact, they are children of Satan (12:24-37). Jesus accuses them of being of the Devil (13:36-43; 15:12-13). These leaders are so corrupt and evil and dishonest that they cannot recognize the power and presence of God's initiative in the history of salvation (21:23). Jesus held them responsible for the future destruction of Jerusalem (22:7). Following His seven woes, Jesus foretells the destruction of their

^[10] city (chapter 24). Is it any wonder that Jesus warned His disciples about the religious leaders in Matthew 24? As Matthew concludes his life of Christ, surely his readers must have reflected upon Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in which He forewarned His disciples: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (7:15).

My objective in writing this dissertation is not to attack those who apply Matthew 7:15 and 24:11, 24 to other Christians that often disagree with the "party cry" of the more than twenty-five divisions within the Churches of Christ. But the chief objective of this dissertation is to help preserve the unity for which Jesus prayed in His priestly prayer (John 17). Hopefully, this dissertation will help individuals to focus more on the context when they want to understand the intent of the author. There is a need, I believe, to guard against interpretations that may not, in spite of all their sincerity, ring true to the Biblical revelation itself. But often, subjective interpretations and dogmatic approaches by many Christians do much to deny the very Scriptures they claim to uphold.

Leaders (preachers, elders, and editors) should be very careful about superimposing upon a text their own speculative and subjective interpretation in order to avoid the very error that Jesus condemned among the religious leaders. May God help every Christian not to apply these Scriptures (Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24) to believers who hold to the use of Sunday school, individual communion cups, wine, grape juice, manner of breaking the bread in the Lord's Supper, the treasury, Bible colleges, instrumental music, hand-clapping, solo singing in the assembly, choirs, and so on. In concluding this study on false prophets in Matthew 7:15 and 24:11, 24, one must again ask himself or herself the question: "How did Christ employ this stinging phrase?"

^[1] Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 2d (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 14.

^[2] Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24; Mark 13:22; Luke 6:26; 2 Pet 2:1; 1 John 4:1.

^[3] The religious leaders go by many names—Pharisees, Sadducees, chief priests, elders, scribes, and Herodians—and they form a co-operative front line against Jesus and thus can be presented as a solitary spirit. The Pharisees, Matthew 9:11,14,34; 12:2, 14, 24; 15:12; 19:3; 22:15, 34, 41; 23:26; the Sadducees, 22:23, 34; Pharisees and Sadducees, 3:7; 16:1, 6, 11, 12; the scribes, 7:29; 8:19; 9:3; 17:10; the scribes and Pharisees, 5:20; 12:38; 15:1; 23:2, 13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29; the chief priests, 26:14, 59; 27:6; 28:11; the elders, 15:2; the chief priest and elders, 21:23; 26:3, 47; 27:1, 3, 12, 20; 28:11-12; the chief priest and Pharisees, 21:45; 27:62; the chief priest and scribes, 2:4; 20:18; 21:15; the scribes and the elders, (with Caiaphas the high priest), 26:57; the elders, chief priests, and scribes, 26:21; 27:41. I am indebted to Warren Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1996), 241, for this collation of Scriptures. His Chapter 15, “Characters: The Religious Leaders—Opponents of God’s Will” is extremely insightful (229-241). I also recommend Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), Chapter 7, “The Antagonist of Jesus,” (115-127).

^[4] See Chapter 2.

^[5] For examples of the illegal use of this phrase in reference to Christians: see the following journals or books: Tyler Young, “Will Great Lakes Christian College Continue to Support False Teachers?” in *Contending for the Faith* 27, no. 3 (March 1996): 12-14; Steve Gibson, “Some Common Questions About False Teachers,” in *The Restorer* 10, no. 11/12 (November/December 1990): 17-19; Allen Bailey, “Beware of False Teachers,” in *Preacher’s Study Notes* (Buffalo, Missouri: Christian’s Expositor Publications, 1996), 69-82; Homer L. King, “Avoid Them,” reprint from 1936, *Old Paths Advocate* LXV, no. 1 (January 1996):2, 6.

^[6] Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 94.

^[7] See also Matthew 15:1-14.

^[8] Jesus develops this destruction more fully in Matthew 24.

^[9] In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned His disciples about external behavior performed for show. In that Sermon, Jesus discloses the same mind-set (Matthew 6:1-8) that He addresses in Matthew 23 and concludes, as is done in Matthew 24 with His warning about false prophets.

^[10] For a brief explanation of Matthew 24, see Dallas Burdette, “Eschatological Judgment in Matthew 24:1—25:13” [ONLINE]. Available from <http://www.freedominchrist.net> [accessed 24 February 1999], located under caption BIBLICAL STUDIES and then under the subheading ESCHATOLOGY. See also Burdette, “The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats,” *Ibid*.

CHAPTER 6

A DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

THE FIRST HOUR

The setting for this project occurred with three independent Churches of Christ: (1) Luverne Church of Christ, (2) Landmark Church of Christ, and (3) Central Church of Christ.^[1] The seminars involved both leaders and lay members. These three engagements did not have any advance study materials to read prior to the three/four-hour training sessions. None of the participants was aware of the procedures that the instructor would follow prior to their coming together. Since all three of the meetings followed the same general format, then the following outline will be given only once to demonstrate the procedures followed in each of the three presentations.^[2]

The first seminar occurred on January 31, 1999; the second seminar occurred on February 1, 1999;^[3] and the third seminar occurred on February 6, 1999.^[4] There were a total of twenty-two participants—twelve from the Luverne Church of Christ, five from the Landmark Church of Christ, and five from the central Church of Christ.

Each of the three seminars began with an introduction by the instructor. This introduction began with his own background within the Churches of Christ. A brief history of the instructor's earlier training and the evolution of his thinking set the stage for the study on "False Prophets in the Gospel of Matthew, Who Are They?" Following this brief opening, the instructor informed the participants that one object of the seminar was to assist them in reading the Word of God more accurately. In order to do this, a large amount of the time allotted for the three/four hour study concentrated on context. Also, it was mentioned that a cursory view of the entire Gospel of Matthew would be presented in order to learn to read in context. Following the overview of Matthew's Gospel, the participants were informed that a compact look at all of the conflict passages would be examined to determine who the false prophets were in the three occurrences of this phrase as stated by Jesus.

At this stage of the study, the instructor talked about the pre-test and post-test that needed to be administered in order to evaluate the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of his sharing with the group. Before the actual study began, the objectives of both pre-and post-test were discussed. Then, each of the participants was given a copy of the pre-test to fill out. The instructor discussed the pre-test and the objective behind this test. In other words, it was pointed out that this test, along with the post-test at the end of the session, should help the instructor to determine if there had been any substantial change in their attitudes toward identifying false prophets.

It was discussed briefly that the use of the phrase "false prophets" was loosely used within the Churches of Christ to castigate almost anyone who differed with the status quo, thus the instructor needed to know their mind-set prior to the seminar. At this point, the instructor called attention to the confusion that presently exists within the Churches of Christ nation-wide as well as locally. One of the major goals of this seminar was to try to bring about unity within the Churches of Christ through a proper understanding of how to read the Gospel of Matthew in context. Also, since there is a great deal of misunderstanding of imperfection in knowledge and fellowship, there is a need to explore this concept prior to dealing with the principles of interpretation concerning false prophets.

Following this pre-test, the instructor began the material that appears in Chapter 1 of his project/dissertation.^[5] It was pointed out that since the instructor's act of ministry is within the Churches of Christ, it was/is incumbent upon him to analyze the current use of the phrase "false prophets" within the Churches of Christ. Since this phrase is generally associated with individuals

who suffer from imperfection in knowledge, then Paul was called upon to determine how he reacted toward those with deficiencies in knowledge of God's Word. To capture the mind of Paul in this area, two letters of Paul were consulted in order to determine how he dealt with problems among the Christians in Corinth and Rome.

Next, a number of cliches commonly employed and misunderstood by many Christians within the Churches of Christ were analyzed. For example, the following is a brief listing of the most common terms floating around within the various fellowships within the Churches of Christ:

- Unity and Fellowship
- Unity and Conformity
- Fellowship and Agreement
- Gospel and Doctrine
- Fellowship and Endorsement

THE SECOND HOUR

The second hour of the seminar focused on the crisis and identification of false prophets within the Churches of Christ and the principles of interpretation. Following this lecture, the participants were given Chapters 2 and 3 of the dissertation (first draft) to assist them in

understanding the problems that presently exist within the Churches of Christ.^[6] The discussion for the first half-hour centered on the common use of the phrase "false prophets" within the Churches of Christ. The instructor discussed his early years as a boy preacher in which he cited Matthew 7:15 to condemn everyone who was not in his own party. From this revelation of his earlier beliefs, he then demonstrated that this same phrase is employed by almost every division (approximately twenty-five) within the Churches of Christ to condemn every person not in the camp of the person doing the name-calling. In discussing the current crisis within the Churches of Christ, four congregations were singled out during this study:

- Seibles Road Church of Christ
- Landmark Church of Christ
- Carriage Hills Church of Christ
- Vaughn Park Church of Christ

The second-half of this second hour centered on the principle of interpretation. Before dealing with the context of individual verses—especially Matthew 7:15—a brief overview of the structure of Matthew's Gospel was presented in order to demonstrate the necessity of looking at the whole before proceeding to the particulars.^[7] Following this brief analysis of the Book of Matthew, a number of examples were presented that illustrated how to interpret the Scriptures in context. To do this the instructor gave to each of the participants the following papers:

- "A Brief History of the One-Cup and Non-Sunday School Movement"
- "Doctrine of Christ in 2 John 9: Subjective or Objective Genitive"
- "Passover Traditions in the First Century"
- "My Pilgrimage of Faith"
- "The Narrow Gate"
- "Judge Not"

The instructor passed these papers out to the participants following the three/four lectures. These papers were written to illustrate the problems that Christians face when they do not interpret according to context.^[8] Context was stressed over and over in order to set the stage for an understanding of how Jesus employed the phrase “false prophets.”

THE THIRD HOUR

The instructor discussed the relevance of literary studies and the importance of looking at the whole before embarking upon the particulars. Again, this particular genre of interpretation was stressed in order to draw attention to context. Over and over again, the instructor stressed the need to look at context in order to interpret and apply the Word of God correctly. In the discussion of literary criticism, the instructor discussed the following terms:

The Implied Reader
Plot
Point of View

In addition to the above points about literary techniques, the three major divisions of the Gospel of Matthew were presented:

First Major Division—the unveiling of Jesus’ identity: 1:1—4:16
Second Major Division—the ministry of Jesus: 4:17—16:20
 Jesus’ Teaching Ministry to Israel: 4:17—11:1
 Jesus’ Healing Ministry to Israel: 4:12—16:20
Third Major Division—the repudiation of Jesus by Israel: 16:21—28:20

THE FOURTH HOUR

During this part of the seminar, the conflict passages were briefly observed in order to set the tone for the phrase “false prophets” as utilized in Matthew 7:15, 24:11, 24. The following is the outline employed in this discussion:

Visit of the Magi—Matthew 2:1-6
Confrontation with John the Baptist—3:7-12
The greater righteousness—5:17-20
The healing of the paralytic—9:1-8
Plucking grain on the Sabbath—12:1-8
 Spiritually blind as to the meaning of
 Law—12:2
 Scripture—12:3, 5, 7
 Characteristics of religious leaders
 Legalistic—12:1-2
 Accusatory—12:1-2
 Unmerciful—12:7
 Judgmental—12:7
Healing of the man with a withered hand—12:9-14
 Leaders’ evaluative point of view—12:10
 Leaders are lawless themselves—5:17-20

Healing of blind and dumb demoniac—12:22-37

Leaders' evaluative point of view—12:24
Leaders opposed to God's point of view—3:17

Demand for a sign—12:38-45

Leaders demand a sign—12:38
Reminiscent of Satan's challenge—4:4-5
Characterized as evil and adulterous—12:39
Reader knows signs already demonstrated—9:6-7

Eating with Defiled hands—15:1-20

Phraseology of Jesus expressed first—12:38
To the leaders—12:3-9
To the crowds—12:10-11
To the disciples—12:13-14, 16-20
 Directly to the leaders—12:3-9
 Indirectly to the leaders—12:13-14
Leaders described as
 Hypocritical—12:7
 Spiritually blind—12:4
 Transgressors of the law—12:3
This lawlessness described as evil
Leaders' trait characteristics (things that defile)—12:19-20
 Spiritual blind
 Leaders do not know how to interpret the law—15:4-6
 Leaders do not distinguish between the things of God and the things of men—15:9
Jesus alludes to the eschatological threat—15:14

Leaders' demand for a second sign—16:1-4

To test and oppose Him—16:1-4
Leaders described as evil—16:4
Jesus rejects the leaders—16:4, 6

The Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees—16:5-12

Jesus' point of view about the leaders—16:6, 11

Religious leaders presented to the reader as:

Characters who are evil—12:34, 39, 45; 16:4
Spiritually blind—12:24, 38, 42; 16:3;
Hypocritical—12:10; 15:7; 16:1; 22:18; 23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 28, 29
Conniving—12:14
Murderous—12:14
Unfaithful to God—12:37; 16:4
Unrepentant—12:41
Lawless—15:3, 6
Likened to a man possessed by a demon—12:43-45
Pictured as acting in a manner representative of Satan—12:38; 16:1

Leaders' attitudes toward others very censorious

Unmerciful and Judgmental—12:7
Legalistic—12:1-8, 9-13; 15:1-20
Accusatory—12:1-2; 15:2

Leaders did not know how to interpret the Law—12:11-12; 15:4-6**Leaders were insincere**

Questioned only to accuse—12:10
Questioned only to test—16:1; 19:3; 22:18, 35
Gave first place to human tradition—15:6-9

Root character traits of the religious leaders are evil

Brood of vipers—23:33
Child of hell—23:15

Chapters in Matthew's Gospel presents the leaders as

Abusive—16:21; 17:12; 21:35; 22:6; 23:34-35
Judgmental—20:18
Unbelieving—21:32
Lawless—23:3-4, 23, 25, 28
Legalistic—23:4
Murderous—16:21; 17:23; 20:18; 21:35, 39; 22:6; 23:34-35

The Leaders' basic evil consisted in

Fundamental Opposition to God—21:28-30, 33-39; 22:1-14
Repeated attempts to test Jesus—19:3; 22:18, 35
Opposition to Jesus as Son of God—21:37-38; 22:2-6

Leaders frequently accused of hypocrisy—22:18; 23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 28, 29

Leaders charged with insincerity—19:3; 22:15, 18, 23-27, 35

Leaders deceptive with regard to the crowds—21:26

Leaders manifested spiritual blindness to the

Scriptures—19:4; 21:16, 42; 22:29, 31, 41-45
Law—22:17-21, 36-40; 23:23-24, 25-26
Power of God—22:19
Spiritual priorities—23:16-22, 23-24, 25-26
Importance of John the Baptist—21:26, 32
Significance of Jesus—21:16, 23; 22:41-45

Plot against Jesus by the religious leaders—26:3-5

Betrayal by Judas—26:14-16

Jesus' arrest—26:47-56

Trial before the Council—26:57-68

Leaders attack Jesus to His face—26:63
Leaders sought false witnesses—26:59-60
Leaders point of view opposed to God's point of view

Jesus delivered to Pilate—27:1-2

Leaders point of view opposed to God's point of view

The Remorse of Judas—27:3-10

Leaders call silver "blood money"—27:6

Pilate questions Jesus—27:1-14

Pilate repeats the charges of the leaders—27:13-14

Pilate condemns Jesus—27:15-26

Action on the part of the leaders out of envy—27:18

Leaders persuaded the crowd to turn against Jesus—27:20

The crucifixion of Jesus—27:33-44

Leaders express their hostilities—27:41-43

Leaders informed about what happened after the resurrection—27:11-15

To the very end, the leaders opposed to God's evaluative point of view

Guards at the tomb—27:62-66

Leaders appeared before Pilate—27:62

Guards are bribed—28:11-15

Following this overview of the conflict in the Gospel of Matthew, the post-test was given to determine if the participants viewed false prophets in a different light than before the lectures began.

CONCLUSION

This three/four hour session was profitable for all. Each of the three groups expressed great interest in continuing their study of this subject. Upon completion of the seminars, the participants were asked for feedback concerning their views—negative or positive—about the seminars. There were only positive responses on the part of the leaders and lay members. The next chapter details these evaluations.

[1]

For a brief description of each of the three congregations, see Chapter 1, pages 13-15.

[2]

This group gathered on a Sunday afternoon between 5:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. at the Luverne Church of Christ in Luverne, AL.

[3]

This cluster of believers met on a Wednesday night between 6:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. at the Landmark Church of Christ in Montgomery, AL.

[4]

This study began on a Saturday morning between 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. at the Central Church of Christ in Montgomery, AL.

[5]

Following the three/four hour seminar, each of the participants was given the first draft of this dissertation. This first chapter is not included as an “appendix” since this chapter is a part of the project/dissertation.

[6]

Chapters 2 and 3 are not included in the “appendices” since these chapters are a part of the project/dissertation.

[7]

For this structural overview, see Chapter 3, pages 45-47. See Chapter 4, pages 64—106 for a detailed analysis of Matthew’s Gospel. This chapter was not given to the participants; during the course of this seminar, the instructor spoke extemporaneously for approximately four hours. The only notes used during the entire seminar centered on the conflict passages in the Gospel of Matthew.

[8]

Since each of these papers was given to each of the participants, the six essays are included in the “appendices.”

CHAPTER 7

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

The act of ministry began with one goal for the instructor and two goals for the participants. The objectives were clearly identified and strategies were developed to measure the results before beginning the seminars. A pretest and a posttest were developed to see if the three goals were accomplished. In order to determine if the goals were met by the leader and for the students, pretest and posttest were given to each of the twenty-two participants.^[1] There were nineteen statements with four choices per statement.

The goal for the leader was to develop a series of essays to enhance one's ability to read the Bible in context. On the other hand, the goals for the participants were to develop an understanding of how to read the Bible in context and to promote more toleration for those who are not in agreement with them on a particular passage. The goals for the participants and the instructor were evaluated according to the responses on the pretest and posttest. Also, two other means were employed in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the goals: (1) conversations following the presentations, and (2) letters sent to the instructor in which some participants expressed their sentiments.

The goals resulted from the nationwide turmoil that exists within many Churches of Christ. Many congregations do not tolerate differences among Christians when they do not subscribe to their brand of orthodoxy in their "interpretative" community. As a result of this mind-set, many Christians herald the epithet "false prophets" against any believer who deviates from the status quo of certain communities.

THE CANDIDATE'S GOAL AND EVALUATION STRATEGY

The nineteen statements, in the pretest and the posttest, were designed to elicit a clearer understanding of the problems that currently exist within the Churches of Christ. The test statements were written to help provide answers to the dilemma that many Christians face in seeking to deal with the nationwide turmoil that divides fathers and mothers, sons and daughter, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, and so on, in their struggles to be true to God and His Word. To see if the goals were accomplished, a brief analysis of the statistical data of each statement is given in Appendix Three.

In this evaluation, the number of respondents are listed in charts in order to assist one in seeing clearly the overall progress made during the seminar. Also, in this evaluation, a number of oral or written responses to the presentations is presented to help determine the real outcome of the goals set for the instructor and the participants. The personal replies were more subjective, but, on the other hand, these expressions of inward feelings indicate, in addition to the objective tests, that the goals were accomplished.

PRETEST AND POSTTEST STATEMENTS

Identification of Legends

Under each statement is legend:^[2] 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree. At the bottom of each chart are the letters B and A, B = Pretest (before) and A = Posttest (after). There were twenty-two persons who participated in the pretest and posttest. Only one of the twenty-two failed to complete the posttest (he/she did not complete statements 1-9). The test requested that each individual respond to the nineteen statements with one of the legends above—SD,

D, A, and SA. The following tables represent the responses before and after the test. Also, the subsequent tables will be grouped according to subject matter, even though the statements were not arranged according to subject order: SDGEN = Sound Doctrine in General; SDMAT = Sound Doctrine in Matthew; ISSGEN = Issues in General; ISSMAT = Issues in Matthew; DEIGEN = Deity in general; DEIMAT = Deity in Matthew. In the following analysis, this evaluation groups all the disagreement statements (SD and D) together and the agreement statements (A and AS) together. The following graphs demonstrate the percentage of persons who expressed their feelings before and after their participation in the seminar. The Strongly Disagree and Disagree are listed first, then the Agree and Strongly Agree are listed in the second part of the graphs.

RESPONSES TO STATEMENTS BEFORE AND AFTER THE PRETEST AND POSTTEST

SOUND DOCTRINE IN GENERAL

Statement One

1. Those who teach wrong doctrine are false prophets/teachers.

The objective of this statement was to determine if the participants considered an individual a false prophet/teacher if he/she misunderstood the Word of God in certain areas and taught such to others.

DISAGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Strongly Disagree Or Disagree	Strongly Disagree Or Disagree	Difference	%
6	14	8	133.33%

Strongly Disagree or Disagree. In the pretest statement, there were 6 individuals who indicated that those who teach wrong doctrine were not false prophets/teachers. But, in the posttest, there were 14 persons who indicated that if a person taught wrong doctrine, then he/she was not a false prophet/teacher. One finds a differential of 8 persons (133.33%) who modified their stance on this distinctive position. This is significant because the commonly held belief is that if one teaches wrong doctrine then he/she is a false prophet/teacher.

AGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Agree Or Strongly Agree	Agree Or Strongly Agree	Difference	%
16	8	-8	-50.00%

Agree or Strongly Agree. In the agreement section, before the presentations, there were 16 individuals who agreed that if one taught false doctrine then that person was a false prophet/teacher. On the other hand, following the presentation, there were only 8 that agreed to the above statement. Thus, the posttest indicates that there was a differential of 8 (-50.00%) who modified their views. The

objective in this area of identification does indicate that the instructor reached his objective in seeking to help individuals correctly identify false prophets/teachers in the Gospel of Matthew.

Statement Five

5. Those who promote unethical behavior are false prophets/teachers.

This statement was designed to determine if the participants identified false prophets/teachers with those whose behavior was not in keeping with the Word of God or if false prophets/teachers were only associated with those who taught error. The following graph blueprints the percentages of individuals who dissented with the above statements.

DISAGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Strongly Disagree Or Disagree	Strongly Disagree Or Disagree		
Before	After	Difference	%
4	6	2	50.00%

Strongly Disagree or Disagree. In the pretest, there were 4 who implied that they did not associate unethical behavior with false prophets/teachers. But in the posttest, there were six who did not identify unethical behavior as one of the characteristics of false prophets/teachers. The data reveals a differential of -2, which results in a 50% increase in the negative response. One cannot help but wonder if the questionnaire was lacking in clarity for this statement to have increased by 2. One purpose in this statement was to help individuals come to an understanding that those who push forward unethical behavior are false prophets/teachers. The instructor did receive feedback that the statements were somewhat confusing.

AGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Agree Or Strongly Agree	Agree Or Strongly Agree		
Before	After	Difference	%
11	18	-7	-61.00%

Agree and Strongly Agree. In the pretest, there were 11 who agreed that those who promote unethical behavior are false prophets/teachers. But in the posttest there were 18 who agreed that those who promote unethical behavior are false prophets/teachers. This response constitutes a differential of 7 (63.64%). The responses in this fifth statement also indicate a positive response in the direction that the instructor sought to accomplish through the presentations. The false prophets that Jesus addressed in the Sermon on the Mount and in the eschatological discourse center on unethical behavior.

Statement Ten

10. Those who extend the right hand of fellowship to those who are not a part of their own mind-set are false prophets/teachers.

This statement was seeking to find out if certain Christians were viewed as false prophets/teachers if they were willing to recognize those Christians not in their own private “interpretative” community as Christians. Within many Churches of Christ, if one steps over the line and recognizes others as Christians who believe in individuals cups, Sunday school, instrumental music in the public assembly of the congregation, wine in the Lord’s Supper or grape juice in the Lord’s Supper, Bible colleges, and so on, then they too are looked upon as false prophets/teachers even though they may not practice the particular beliefs that some dislike. The two following charts indicate the response on the part of the participants:

DISAGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Strongly Disagree Or Disagree	Strongly Disagree Or Disagree		
Before	After	Difference	%
21	19	-2	-9.52%

Strongly Disagree or Disagree. There were 21 who denied that if one extended fellowship to those who do did not agree with their understanding of the Scriptures as false prophets/teachers. But on the posttest there were nineteen who disagreed with the above statement. The pretest and posttest indicates that there were -2, which results in a -9.52%. The following chart is the agreement section of the above statement:

AGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Agree Or Strongly Agree	Agree Or Strongly Agree		
Before	After	Difference	%
1	1	0	0.00%

Agree or Strongly Agree. There was no differentiation between the pretest and posttest responses. There was one before and one after that advanced the notion that if one extended the right hand of fellowship to those who are not a part of their own mind-set are false prophets/teachers. This is an indication that those who took the test were far more advanced in their thinking in this regard than many within the Churches of Christ.

Statement Twelve

12. Those who push for unity in diversity are false prophets/teachers.

Many Christians suggest the belief that the teaching called “unity in diversity” is contrary to the teachings of God. And as a result of this belief, there are those who introduce the opinion that no one can have fellowship unless there is agreement on doctrinal questions. On the other hand, there are those who say that one can only experience unity in diversity since that is the only kind of unity one can experience. The above statement was to determine the understanding of the participants before and after the presentation.

DISAGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree		

Or Disagree	Or Disagree		
Before	After	Difference	%
17	18	1	5.88%

Strongly Disagree or Disagree. The pretest reveals that there were 17 who disagreed with the above statement, but the posttest reveals that there was a gain of one. Since there were 18 who disagreed in the posttest this resulted in a 5.88% gain. Again, the pretest reveals the advance thinking in the minds of many that does not coincide with the status quo within many Churches of Christ. The next chart reveals the number that agreed with the above statement (12).

AGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Agree Or Strongly Agree	Agree Or Strongly Agree		
Before	After	Difference	%
5	3	-2	-40.00%

Agree or Strongly Agree. Prior to the presentation, there were 5 who proposed the notion that if one sanctioned unity in diversity, then that individual was a false prophet/teacher. But in the posttest that number dropped to 3, which indicates a -40.00%. Again, some ground was made in bringing about change in the overall outlook.

SOUND DOCTRINE IN MATTHEW

Statement Seventeen

17. The teaching in Matthew 7:15 refers to the religious leaders in Matthew.

Matthew 7:15 is cited by many well-meaning Christians to justify their epithet of false prophet to those who do not conform to traditional interpretation offered by certain groups. This statement also makes known the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the presentation on false prophets.

DISAGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Strongly Disagree Or Disagree	Strongly Disagree Or Disagree		
Before	After	Difference	%
4	2	-2	-50.00%

This pretest reveals that there were only 4 who disagreed with the idea that Matthew 7:15 did not refer to the religious leaders. In the posttest this number decreased to 2, which indicates that there was a -50.00% change in their attitudes toward identification of false prophets in Matthew 7:15. The ensuing chart relates to the agreement side:

AGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Agree	Agree		

Or Strongly Agree	Or Strongly Agree		
Before	After	Difference	%
18	19	1	5.56%

In the pretest there were 18 who responded by saying that Matthew 7:15 referred to the religious leaders in Jesus' day. Following the presentation, this number increased by 1, thus there was a gain of 5.56%. Even though the change is small, nevertheless, this increase is still significant for the objective of this seminar.

Statement Eighteen

18. The teaching in Matthew 7:15 addresses the ethical behavior of the religious leaders in Jesus' day.

This statement sought to determine if the participants identified the false prophets in Matthew 7:15 as dealing with the religious leaders. Generally, within the Churches of Christ, false prophets are not associated with unethical behavior but with doctrinal behavior. The chart below reveals the mind-set of the participants:

DISAGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Strongly Disagree Or Disagree	Strongly Disagree Or Disagree		
Before	After	Difference	%
6	2	-4	-66.67%

Strongly Disagree or Disagree. The statistics reveal that prior to the presentation there were 6 who disagreed with statement eighteen. But after the seminar the number dropped to 2, which is a -4. This means that there was a -66.67% difference between the pre-and posttest differentiation. In other words, only two still held to the belief that Matthew 7:15 addresses the ethical behavior of the religious leaders in Jesus' day. The agreement chart is also quite revealing concerning Matthew 7:15.

AGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Agree Or Strongly Agree	Agree Or Strongly Agree		
Before	After	Difference	%
16	19	3	18.75%

Agree or Strongly Agree. In the pretest, there were 16 who agreed that Matthew 7:15 did have reference to the ethical behavior of the religious leaders in Jesus' day. But, on the other hand, there was an increase in the posttest by 3, which resulted in a positive figure of 18.75%.

ISSUES IN GENERAL

Statement Two

2. Those who advocate solo singing in the congregation are false prophets/teachers.

This point of singing solo is one of the verbalized concerns within the Churches of Christ. It is not uncommon for Christians to describe anyone who allows solo singing in the assembly as false prophets. The following chart discloses that the three groups tested did not hold as strongly to the established contention.

DISAGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Strongly Disagree Or Disagree	Strongly Disagree Or Disagree		
Before	After	Difference	%
16	21	5	31.25%

Strongly Disagree or Disagree. The numbers were 16 before and 21 after that refused to identify individuals as false prophets if they advanced the idea that was scriptural for individuals to sing solo in the assembly. Since there were 5 more to join the disagree section, then this change represents a 31.25% increase in change from the pretest. The other chart is also significant in what it reveals in this regard.

AGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Agree Or Strongly Agree	Agree Or Strongly Agree		
Before	After	Difference	%
6	0	-6	-100.00%

Agree or Strongly Agree. The pretest revealed that 6 individuals agreed that if one were to sing solo in the assembly then that would constitute the epithet of “false prophet/teacher.” On the other hand, the posttest was a complete reversal—no one was considered a false prophet if he/she advocated solo singing in the assembly. The statistical data for the posttest is -100.00%. This again indicates that there was a change in one’s view concerning statement 2.

Statement Three

3. Those who advance hand clapping in the assembly are false prophets/teachers.

Hand clapping in the assembly is another anathema within many Churches of Christ. If one advances such conduct, then this behavior is sufficient to receive the phrase “false prophet/teacher.” The results are also quite revealing with the three congregations that participated in this seminar.

DISAGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Strongly Disagree Or Disagree	Strongly Disagree Or Disagree		
Before	After	Difference	%
18	20	2	11.11%

Strongly Disagree or Disagree. Again, this pretest and posttest reveal the unusual acceptance of handclapping within the Churches of Christ as permissible behavior. Even before the presentation, 18 stated that they did not identify individuals as false prophets/teachers if they advanced the notion of clapping hands during a worship service. After the seminar, one observes that two who had previously identified hand clapping as sinful now said “no.” The difference between 18 and 20 is 2 which represents 11.11% change in thinking. The next chart that deals with agreement is also quite telling.

AGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Agree Or Strongly Agree	Agree Or Strongly Agree		
Before	After	Difference	%
4	2	-2	-50.00%

Agree or Strongly Agree. Before the seminar, there were 4 who agreed that clapping hands in the assembly could call forth the epithet “false prophet/teacher” upon the one who practiced such behavior. But after the seminar, this shifted to a reduction of only 2 who still maintained the early position. Once more, the statistical data indicates a -50.00% reduction in agreement section. This response again upholds the goal of the instructor in which he sought to bring about change in their reading of the Scriptures.

Statement Four

4. Those who encourage instrumental music in the assembly are false prophets/teachers.

The use of the instrument in the assembly is one of the most vocal points of concern that exist within many Churches of Christ. To use the instrument is one of the most heinous sins that one can be guilty of among many circles. The pretest and posttest are quite revealing in demonstrating the centrality of this issue among many Christians. The following chart illustrates the focal point of this belief and the change in responses to this statement during the seminar:

DISAGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Strongly Disagree Or Disagree	Strongly Disagree Or Disagree		
Before	After	Difference	%
10	18	8	80.00%

Strongly Disagree or Disagree. The pretest discloses that 10 disagreed with statement 4, but the posttest also reveals that 8 more added their names to the side in which they no longer held to the belief that if one employed the instrument in the assembly that he/she deserved the phrase “false prophet/teacher.” This attests that there was an 80.00% positive response in their movement. This is what the instructor sought to bring about by looking at the context. Also the next chart is really another revelation in change.

AGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
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Agree Or Strongly Agree	Agree Or Strongly Agree		
Before	After	Difference	%
12	4	-8	-66.67%

Agree or Strongly Agree. In the pretest, there were 12 who identified individuals as false prophets/teachers if they encouraged instrumental music in the assembly. But, following the presentation on “False Prophets in the Gospel of Matthew, Who Are They?” only four held to their previous convictions. Again this is a differential of -8, which is a -66.67% change. Once more, one observes a change in positions held. Over and over again, this is what the instructor sought to accomplish in his teaching Christians how to read the Bible more effectively.

Statement Eight

8. Those who advocate kitchens in the church buildings are false prophets/teachers.

Strongly Disagree or Disagree. This statement is not in the same category as some of the other statements. If this pretest and posttest had been administered within the Churches of Christ that hold to Statement Eight, then one would have observed a significant difference in the responses. But, one observes that within the three congregations tested none held to the view that those who advocate kitchens in the church buildings are false prophets/teachers. The following chart illustrates the above comments:

DISAGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Strongly Disagree Or Disagree	Strongly Disagree Or Disagree		
Before	After	Difference	%
22	22	0	0.00%

Agree or Strongly Agree. All of the participants, before and after the test, renounced that one is a false prophet/teacher for utilizing kitchens in the church buildings. On the agreement side, one also observes that not one person agreed with Statement Eight.

AGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Agree Or Strongly Agree	Agree Or Strongly Agree		
Before	After	Difference	%
0	0	0	0.00%

Statement Nine

9. Those who promote or tolerate the raising of the hands in a worship service are false prophets/teachers.

Strongly Disagree or Disagree. The pretest and posttest are as revealing in nature as Statement Eight. Even though many within the Churches of Christ condemn the raising of hands in the assembly, nevertheless, this is not the case within the three congregations that participated in the presentations. There is one exception to the above statement that is revealed in the agreement section. The first disagreement chart is enlightening.

DISAGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Strongly Disagree Or Disagree	Strongly Disagree Or Disagree		
Before	After	Difference	%
20	20	0	0.00%

Agree or Strongly Agree. The agreement chart does reveal that two in the pretest agreed that if one promoted or tolerated the raising of hand in a worship service, then that person is a false prophet/teacher. But in the posttest, one of these individuals changed his/her mind. There was a differential of 1, which is a -50.00%. Again, one still observes change. This is what the instructor sought to bring about.

AGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Agree Or Strongly Agree	Agree Or Strongly Agree		
Before	After	Difference	%
2	1	-1	-50.00%

Statement Eleven

10. Those who fellowship individuals in the Christian Church are false prophets/teachers.

Strongly Disagree or Disagree. One finds an identical response to Statement Nine. Among the Christians that shared in the seminar, one again observes that this is not an issue over which they are ready to hurl the epithet “false prophet/teacher.” Even though many Churches of Christ believe that fellowship with this body of believers is tantamount to being a false prophet/teacher, this was not the consensus of the majority of those who took part in the seminar.

DISAGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Strongly Disagree Or Disagree	Strongly Disagree Or Disagree		
Before	After	Difference	%
20	20	0	0.00%

Agree or Strongly Disagree. As in Statement Nine, there were two who advanced the notion that they agreed with statement 10, but in the posttest this dropped by 50.00%. The following chart is the disagreement segment:

AGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Agree Or Strongly Agree	Agree Or Strongly Agree		
Before	After	Difference	%
2	1	-1	-50.00%

ISSUES IN MATTHEW

Statement Thirteen

13. The warning or teaching in Matthew 7:15 is applicable to those who employ the instrument in the worship service.

Matthew 7:15 is cited by many well-meaning Christians to censure other Christians who employ the instrument in the worship service. This statement was made to determine how many in the three groups held to this position before the presentation. By giving a posttest following the pretest, this enabled the instructor to determine if sharing the context made any significant difference in their answers. The following charts indicate a change in the overall attitude in answer to the statement. The first chart is the disagreement chart to the above statement.

DISAGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Strongly Disagree Or Disagree	Strongly Disagree Or Disagree		
Before	After	Difference	%
14	20	6	42.86%

Strongly Disagree or Disagree. In the pretest, there were 14 who rejected the notion that Matthew 7:15 is applicable to those who employ the instrument in the worship service. In the posttest, this number jumped to 20. This indicates a gain of 6, which is an increase of 42.86% that no longer held to their views in the pretest. Once more, this suggests that the Matthean study made a difference in their rethinking their traditional views in light of the context. The next chart is also an eye-opener.

AGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Agree Or Strongly Agree	Agree Or Strongly Agree		
Before	After	Difference	%
8	1	-7	-87.50%

Agree or Strongly Agree. Prior to the seminar, there were 8 who agreed with the statement that Matthew 7:15 is applicable to those who employ the instrument in the worship service. But in the posttest, one observes a differential of -7, which from a statistical viewpoint is -87.50%. Again, one

observes that only one out of 8 held to the pretest position. Apparently, the reason for such transformation is learning how to read the Gospel of Matthew in context.

Statement Fourteen

14. The warning or teaching in Matthew 7:15 is applicable to those who allow solo or quartet singing in the assembly.

Once more, the objective of this statement was to determine if the presentation made any difference in their thinking. In the disagreement section, one observes a 40.00% difference between the pre- and posttest results. The following chart gives the available figures of the test:

DISAGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Strongly Disagree Or Disagree	Strongly Disagree Or Disagree		
Before	After	Difference	%
15	21	6	40.00%

Strongly Disagree or Disagree. This is still a substantial difference between the two tests. Prior to the presentation, there were 15 who disagreed with the opinion that Matthew 7:15 applied to those who allowed solo or quartet singing in the assembly. Following the seminar, there were 21 who took the position that Matthew 7:15 did not apply to those who practiced such things in a worship service. This is a differentiation of 6, which is a 40.00% increase in change. Again, the instructor can only account for this as a result of the effort spent in calling attention to context. The next chart also reveals astonishing change between the pre- and posttest.

AGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Agree Or Strongly Agree	Agree Or Strongly Agree		
Before	After	Difference	%
7	0	-7	-100.00%

Agree or Strongly Agree. In the pretest, there were 7 who maintained that Matthew 7:15 applied to those who allowed solo or quartet singing in the assembly. But in the posttest, there was a 100.00% reversal from the pretest. Once more, this statistical data demonstrates that when one reads Matthew in context then one comes away with a different perspective.

Statement Fifteen

15. The warning or teaching in Matthew 7:15 is applicable to those who practice handclapping during a worship service.

The issues in Matthew are similar to the issues in general. The major variance has to do with Matthew 7:15. Since the seminars centered on “False Prophets in the Gospel of Matthew, Who Are They?” then it was important to ask the similar questions in order to determine the effectiveness of the seminar as far as change is concerned. In the pretest, there were 18 who stated that they did not believe that Matthew 7:15 was applicable to those who practiced handclapping during a worship

service. Following the presentation, there were 20 who denied that this verse had to do with those who handclap in the assembly. The following is an analysis of Statement Fifteen:

DISAGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Strongly Disagree Or Disagree	Strongly Disagree Or Disagree		
Before	After	Difference	%
18	20	2	11.11%

Strongly Disagree or Disagree. There was a differential of 2 between the pre- and posttest results. This statistical data shows an increase of 11.11%. This again confirms the belief that if people are exposed to how to read the Bible more effectively, this will alter their traditional thinking. Even in the agreement section, one detects a notable variance.

AGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Agree Or Strongly Agree	Agree Or Strongly Agree		
Before	After	Difference	%
4	1	-3	-75.00%

Agree or Strongly Agree. Before the seminar began, there were 4 who stated that if one practices handclapping in the assembly, then one could legitimately apply Matthew 7:15 to those individuals who practice such behavior. But after a thorough analysis of Matthew, along with the principles of how to interpret, there was a differential of -3, which is -75.00%. This posttest again confirms the hypothesis of the instructor that anyone exposed to an in-depth overview of the Gospel of Matthew would not interpret 7:15 to those who handclap in the assembly.

Statement Sixteen

16. The warning or teaching in Matthew 7:15 is applicable to those who advocate fellowship with other believers who employ musical instruments in their worship services.

Strongly Disagree or Disagree. The pretest indicates that 17 disagreed with statement 16. The participants denied that Matthew 7:15 could be applied to those who employ musical instruments in their worship services. The posttest also indicated that there was a differential of 2. Thus, the posttest reveals an 11.76% difference. Again, one witnesses change when one is exposed to the basic principle of how to read the Gospel of Matthew. The subsequent chart illustrates the details:

DISAGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Strongly Disagree Or Disagree	Strongly Disagree Or Disagree		
Before	After	Difference	%
17	19	2	11.76%

Agree or Strongly Agree. In the pretest and posttest no one answered any of the agreement statements. The following is a chart for illustrative purposes:

AGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Agree Or Strongly Agree	Agree Or Strongly Agree		
Before	After	Difference	%
5	2	-3	-60.00%

The significant eye-opener is that in this agreement statement there was a decrease by 3 in the number that asserted that those who employ instrumental music in their worship services are false prophets. The posttest reveals a differentiation of 3, which is -60.00%. Thus, once more one observes a change in earlier views about Matthew 7:15.

DEITY IN GENERAL

Statement Six

6. Those who deny the Messiahship of Jesus are false prophets/teachers.

Strongly Disagree or Disagree. The statistics in the pretest and posttest are quite surprising. In the pretest there was only 1 response in which one person stated that they disagreed with Statement Six. But after the presentation, this individual also stated in the posttest that if one denied the Messiahship of Jesus then that person was a false prophet. As a result of the intense study of the Gospel of Matthew, change was brought about for this person's thinking.

DISAGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Strongly Disagree Or Disagree	Strongly Disagree Or Disagree		
Before	After	Difference	%
1	0	-1	-100.00%

Agree or Strongly Agree. One can observe the statistical data and see that the presentation accomplished its objective in teaching one how to read the Bible more effectively through context. In the posttest chart below on the agreement statements, one observes that there were 21 who agreed before and 22 who agreed after the seminar. This again confirms the above statistical data in which the one person changed his/her mind. Since the differential is 1, this resulted in 4.76%.

AGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Agree Or Strongly Agree	Agree Or Strongly Agree		
Before	After	Difference	%
21	22	1	4.76%

Statement Seven

7. Those who renounce the first coming (incarnation) of Jesus in the flesh are false prophets/teachers.

Strongly Disagree or Disagree. In the pretest, only 1 disagreed with Statement Seven. In other words, one person disagreed with the statement that if one denied the incarnation then one was not a false prophet. It appears that the person misunderstood the statement or just marked the wrong number. But in the posttest, one also finds 0 response after the presentation, which results in a differentiation of -1. Again, gain was made.

DISAGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Strongly Disagree Or Disagree	Strongly Disagree Or Disagree		
Before	After	Difference	%
1	0	-1	-100.00%

Agree or Strongly Agree. In the agreement section before and after the seminar, there was an even number that affirmed that if one denied the incarnation, then that person would be considered a false prophet.

AGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Agree Or Strongly Agree	Agree Or Strongly Agree		
Before	After	Difference	%
20	20	0	0.00%

DEITY IN MATTHEW

Statement Nineteen

19. The teaching in Matthew 7:15 refers to those who rejected Jesus' Messiah.

Strongly Disagree or Disagree. The pretest reveals that 4 advanced the notion that Matthew 7:15 could not be applied to those who denied the Messiahship of Jesus, but in the posttest one observes a decrease in this number to 2. From the statistical data there is a -50.00%. So again, there are favorable results from the presentation.

DISAGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Strongly Disagree Or Disagree	Strongly Disagree Or Disagree		
Before	After	Difference	%
4	2	-2	-50.00%

Agree or Strongly Agree. In the pretest, one observes that 18 agreed that if a person rejected the Messiahship of Jesus, then Matthew 7:15 could justifiably be applied to that person. But after the seminar there was a gain of 1; there were now 19 who affirmed the statement. This increase resulted in a net gain of 5.56%.

AGREEMENT RESPONSES TO PRE AND POSTTEST			
Agree Or Strongly Agree	Agree Or Strongly Agree		
Before	After	Difference	%
18	19	1	5.56%

RESPONSES FROM PARTICIPANTS

The following are various responses from the participants immediately following the Seminar:

Written Statements From Participants on Posttest

- “Enjoyed very much! Very helpful in studying.”
- “Great Seminar. Thanks: Dallas.”
- “The information was very helpful. Brother Burdette did an outstanding job.”
- “This has been one of the most eye-opening and sensible seminars that I have participated in, in over 15 years. And we barely tipped the iceberg. Starving for more. I’ve learned to think today.”

Letters Written Four Weeks After the Seminar

The following are excerpts from some of the letters written to the instructor. These letters were requested to help determine the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the three/four hour seminar training:

- “The seminar was very helpful—especially in noticing the running (continual) conflict in Matthew’s Gospel between Jesus and the religious leaders. I also noticed a great focus on “fruit” in Matthew that I had not recognized before.

The seminar was a positive experience which strengthened my commitment to examine my adherence to traditions—which often claim Biblical authority—in light of the Scriptures.”

- “Some of the items discussed were helpful but some left me more confused. I am going to do a lot more studying on my own.”
- “I enjoyed the seminar very much. It was very helpful in understanding “false prophets.” I had never thought of those that were indicated in the seminar as being “false prophets.” I suppose my thoughts of a ‘false prophet’ would have been someone who taught something

a little more radical, such as Christ not being the Messiah, but I was surprised to think that using instruments or having Sunday school was considered false teaching.

However, I think the study was more helpful to me in learning how to study the Bible as a whole. It helped me in seeing how to use all passages as a whole on any one topic.”

- “There was a lot of helpful information and I’m thankful I had the opportunity to participate in this seminar. I have been aware for a long time that some leaders and teachers in the Church have done more harm than good and that their teachings are not always in accordance with God’s Word. By keying in on Matt. 7:15 makes me want to study more and love more lest me and mine are defined as a false prophet by our Savior Jesus Christ.”
- “I am writing in response to your request for comments concerning your meeting with the Landmark elders. I would first like to say that the evening was very enjoyable and informative. You were very well prepared and professional in both your presentation and manner. Your presentation was very though provoking in its content.

There were many valuable points presented throughout the evening. The ‘three’ points that I still think about often are ‘CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT.’ I would have considered the time well spent if the only point had been the importance of studying God’s word within its proper context.

Dallas, I am thankful that there are men of your character and scholarship at work within our brotherhood today.”

- “Dallas did a masterful job in identifying who the false teachers were that Jesus was warning about in Matt. 7:15. He used the writings of John and Paul to identify who false prophets are as found in Scripture. He was careful to caution about the lifting of Scripture from its context and using it to prove a preconceived position. Through Scripture, logic and his own religious heritage, Dallas systematically and successfully dispelled the erroneous judgment by many who conclude that all who differ with their accepted religious practices is a false teacher.”
- “Brother Dallas Burdette’s material appeared to be thoroughly researched and was presented in a very efficient and informative manner. The questionnaire relative to the subject was appropriate and though-provoking.”
- “Your observation that our various factions use the same Scripture to alienate each other needs to be preached more. It is disturbing how we blind ourselves to our sectarian spirit with our own self-righteousness.”

CONCLUSION

Evaluations of the three/four hour seminar proved overwhelmingly positive. There were some shortcomings in the seminar. First, the seminar was too short. There should have been at least six sessions of two hours each—one per week. Second, the handouts should have been given prior to each study. This would have allowed more participation and greater understanding. Third, the pretest

and posttest statements should have been grouped according to various categories. Fourth, there should have been more time spent in explaining the test before requesting the participants to answer.

The letters received from the participants also confirm the effectiveness of what the instructor set out to accomplish. Following the seminar, several people let it be known how much they had learned. One minister said that he had learned more about the Bible in four hours than he had in his previous fifteen years of preaching. There were other similar remarks that only confirm the affirmation of the goals set at the beginning of this seminar. Hopefully, this material can be used by others to teach Christians how to read the Bible more accurately.

^[1]

See Appendix II for charts that record the responses from the participants. The charts give the total number of answers given by the respondents. One can see at a glance the changes that occurred in the Posttest. See also Appendix III for the various percentages of change before and after the test.

^[2]

See Appendix I for the Pretest and Posttest Questionnaires.

Elders, Ministers, and Members Survey

What Do You Think About False Prophets in the Gospel of Matthew?

Pre-test

INSTRUCTIONS:

- ✓ Do not write your name on this paper.
- ✓ For each item, please circle the number that represents your view. Please use the following scale:

1= Strongly Disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Agree; 4= Strongly Agree.

Please respond to every item; do not skip any item.

STATEMENTS ABOUT FALSE PROPHETS/TEACHERS		SCALE			
1.	Those who teach wrong doctrine are false prophets/teachers.	1	2	3	4
2.	Those who advocate solo singing in the congregation are false prophets/teachers.	1	2	3	4
3.	Those who advance handclapping in the assembly are false prophets/teachers.	1	2	3	4
4.	Those who encourage instrumental music in the assembly are false prophets/teachers.	1	2	3	4
5.	Those who promote unethical behavior are false prophets/ teachers.	1	2	3	4
6.	Those who deny the Messiahship of Jesus are false prophets/teachers.	1	2	3	4
7.	Those who renounce the first coming (incarnation) of Jesus in the flesh are false prophets/teachers.	1	2	3	4
8.	Those who advocate kitchens in the church buildings are false prophets/teachers.	1	2	3	4
9.	Those who promote or tolerate the raising of the hands in a worship service are false prophets/teachers.	1	2	3	4
10.	Those who extend the right hand of fellowship to those that are not a part of their own mind set are false prophets/teachers.	1	2	3	4
11.	Those who fellowship individuals in the Christian Church are false prophets/teachers.	1	2	3	4
12.	Those who push for unity in diversity are false prophets/teachers.	1	2	3	4
13.	The warning or teaching in Matthew 7:15 is applicable to those who employ the instrument in the worship service.	1	2	3	4
14.	The warning or teaching in Matthew 7:15 is applicable to those who allow solo or quartet singing in the assembly.	1	2	3	4
15.	The warning or teaching in Matthew 7:15 is applicable to those who practice handclapping during a worship service	1	2	3	4
16.	The warning or teaching in Matthew 7:15 is applicable to those who advocate fellowship with other believers who employ musical instruments in their worship services.	1	2	3	4
17.	The teaching in Matthew 7:15 refers to the religious leaders of Jesus' day.	1	2	3	4
18.	The teaching in Matthew 7:15 addresses the ethical behavior of the religious leaders in Jesus' day.	1	2	3	4
19.	The teaching in Matthew 7:15 refers to those who rejected Jesus' Messiahship.	1	2	3	4

Comments by the participants:

Elders, Ministers, and Members Survey

What Do You Think About False Prophets in the Gospel of Matthew?

Post-test

INSTRUCTIONS:

- ✓ Do not write your name on this paper.
- ✓ For each item, please circle the number that represents your view. Please use the following scale:

1= Strongly Disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Agree; 4= Strongly Agree.

Please respond to every item; do not skip any item.

STATEMENTS ABOUT FALSE PROPHETS/TEACHERS		SCALE			
1.	Those who teach wrong doctrine are false prophets/teachers.	1	2	3	4
2.	Those who advocate solo singing in the congregation are false prophets/teachers.	1	2	3	4
3.	Those who advance handclapping in the assembly are false prophets/teachers.	1	2	3	4
4.	Those who encourage instrumental music in the assembly are false prophets/teachers.	1	2	3	4
5.	Those who promote unethical behavior are false prophets/ teachers.	1	2	3	4
6.	Those who deny the Messiahship of Jesus are false prophets/teachers.	1	2	3	4
7.	Those who renounce the first coming (incarnation) of Jesus in the flesh are false prophets/teachers.	1	2	3	4
8.	Those who advocate kitchens in the church buildings are false prophets/teachers.	1	2	3	4
9.	Those who promote or tolerate the raising of the hands in a worship service are false prophets/teachers.	1	2	3	4
10.	Those who extend the right hand of fellowship to those that are not a part of their own mind set are false prophets/teachers.	1	2	3	4
11.	Those who fellowship individuals in the Christian Church are false prophets/teachers.	1	2	3	4
12.	Those who push for unity in diversity are false prophets/teachers.	1	2	3	4
13.	The warning or teaching in Matthew 7:15 is applicable to those who employ the instrument in the worship service.	1	2	3	4
14.	The warning or teaching in Matthew 7:15 is applicable to those who allow solo or quartet singing in the assembly.	1	2	3	4
15.	The warning or teaching in Matthew 7:15 is applicable to those who practice handclapping during a worship service	1	2	3	4
16.	The warning or teaching in Matthew 7:15 is applicable to those who advocate fellowship with other believers who employ musical instruments in their worship services.	1	2	3	4
17.	The teaching in Matthew 7:15 refers to the religious leaders of Jesus' day.	1	2	3	4
18.	The teaching in Matthew 7:15 addresses the ethical behavior of the religious leaders in Jesus' day.	1	2	3	4
19.	The teaching in Matthew 7:15 refers to those who rejected Jesus' Messiahship.	1	2	3	4

Comments by the participants:

RESPONSES TO STATEMENT BEFORE AND AFTER THE PRETEST AND POSTTEST

SDGEN = SOUND DOCTRINE IN GENERAL

Legend: SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree

Legend: A = agree; SA = strongly agree

Legend: B = before (pre-test)

Legend: A = after (post-test)

Legend: Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, and so one) = number of participants

1. Those who teach wrong doctrine are false prophets/teachers.							
	SD	D	A	SA			
23							
22							
21							
20							
19							
18							
17							
16							
15							
14							
13							
12							
11							
10							
9							
8							
7							
6							
5							
4							
3							
2							
1							
	B	A	B	A	B	A	B

5. Those who promote unethical behavior are false prophets/teachers.							
	SD	D	A	SA			
23							
22							
21							
20							
19							
18							
17							
16							
15							
14							
13							
12							
11							
10							
9							
8							
7							
6							
5							
4							
3							
2							
1							
	B	A	B	A	B	A	B

SDGEN = SOUND DOCTRINE IN GENERAL

Legend: SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree

Legend: A = agree; SA = strongly agree

Legend: B = before (pre-test)

Legend: A = after (post-test)

Legend: Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, and so one) = number of responses

10. Those who extend the right hand of fellowship to those that are not a part of their own mind set are false prophets/teachers

	SD	D	A	SA
23				
22				
21				
20				
19				
18				
17				
16				
15				
14				
13				
12				
11				
10				
9				
8				
7				
6				
5				
4				
3				
2				
1				
	B	A	B	A

12. Those who push for unity in diversity are false prophets/teachers

	SD	D	A	SA
23				
22				
21				
20				
19				
18				
17				
16				
15				
14				
13				
12				
11				
10				
9				
8				
7				
6				
5				
4				
3				
2				
1				
	B	A	B	A

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

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SDMAT = SOUND DOCTRINE IN MATTHEW

Legend: SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree

Legend: A = agree; SA = strongly agree

Legend: B = before (pre-test)

Legend: A = after (post-test)

Legend: Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, and so one) = number of responses

17. The teaching in Matthew 7:15 refers to the religious leaders of Jesus day.

	SD	D	A	SA
23				
22				
21				
20				
19				
18				
17				
16				
15				
14				
13				
12				
11				
10				
9				
8				
7				
6				
5				
4				
3				
2				
1				

18. The teaching in Matthew 7:15 addresses the ethical behavior of the religious leaders in Jesus' day.

	SD	D	A	SA
23				
22				
21				
20				
19				
18				
17				
16				
15				
14				
13				
12				
11				
10				
9				
8				
7				
6				
5				
4				
3				
2				
1				

	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A
--	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A
--	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

ISSGEN = ISSUES IN GENERAL

Legend: SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree

Legend: A = agree; SA = strongly agree

Legend: B = before (pre-test)

Legend: A = after (post-test)

Legend: Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, and so one) = number of responses

2. Those who advocate solo singing in the congregation are false teachers/prophets.

	SD	D	A	SA
23				
22				
21				
20				
19				
18				
17				
16				
15				
14				
13				
12				
11				
10				
9				
8				
7				
6				
5				
4				
3				
2				
1				

3. Those who advance handclapping in the assembly are false prophets/teachers.

	SD	D	A	SA
23				
22				
21				
20				
19				
18				
17				
16				
15				
14				
13				
12				
11				
10				
9				
8				
7				
6				
5				
4				
3				
2				
1				

	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A
--	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A
--	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

ISSGEN = ISSUES IN GENERAL

Legend: SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree

Legend: A = agree; SA = strongly agree

Legend: B = before (pre-test)

Legend: A = after (post-test)

Legend: Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, and so one) = number of responses

4. Those who encourage instrumental music in the assembly are false prophets/teachers.

	SD	D	A	SA
23				
22				
21				
20				
19				
18				
17				
16				
15				
14				
13				
12				
11				
10				
9				
8				
7				
6				
5				
4				
3				
2				
1				
	B	A	B	A

8. Those who advocate kitchens in the church buildings are false prophets/teachers

	SD	D	A	SA
23				
22				
21				
20				
19				
18				
17				
16				
15				
14				
13				
12				
11				
10				
9				
8				
7				
6				
5				
4				
3				
2				
1				
	B	A	B	A

ISSGEN = ISSUES IN GENERAL

Legend: SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree

Legend: A = agree; SA = strongly agree

Legend: B = before (pre-test)

Legend: A = after (post-test)

Legend: Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, and so one) = number of responses

9. Those who promote or tolerate the raising of the hands in a worship service are false prophets/teachers.

	SD	D	A	SA
23				
22				
21				
20				
19				
18				
17				
16				
15				
14				
13				
12				
11				
10				
9				
8				
7				
6				
5				
4				
3				
2				
1				
	B	A	B	A

11. Those who fellowship individuals in the Christian Church are false prophets/teachers

	SD	D	A	SA
23				
22				
21				
20				
19				
18				
17				
16				
15				
14				
13				
12				
11				
10				
9				
8				
7				
6				
5				
4				
3				
2				
1				
	B	A	B	A

ISSMAT = ISSUES IN MATTHEW

Legend: SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree

Legend: A = agree; SA = strongly agree

Legend: B = before (pre-test)

Legend: A = after (post-test)

Legend: Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, and so one) = number of responses

13. The warning or teaching in Matthew 7:15 is applicable to those who employ the instrument in the worship service.

	SD	D	A	SA
23				
22				
21				
20				
19				
18				
17				
16				
15				
14				
13				
12				
11				
10				
9				
8				
7				
6				
5				
4				
3				

14. The warning or teaching in Matthew 7:15 is applicable to those who allow solo or quartet singing in the assembly.

	SD	D	A	SA
23				
22				
21				
20				
19				
18				
17				
16				
15				
14				
13				
12				
11				
10				
9				
8				
7				
6				
5				
4				
3				

2								
1								
	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A

2								
1								
	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A

ISSGEN = ISSUES IN MATTHEW

Legend: SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree

Legend: A = agree; SA = strongly agree

Legend: B = before (pre-test)

Legend: A = after (post-test)

Legend: Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, and so one) = number of responses

15. The warning or teaching in Matthew 7:15 is applicable to those who practice handclapping during a worship service.

	SD	D	A	SA
23				
22				
21				
20				
19				
18				
17				
16				
15				
14				
13				
12				
11				
10				
9				
8				
7				
6				
5				
4				
3				
2				
1				
	B	A	B	A

16. The warning or teaching in Matthew 7:15 is applicable to those who advocate fellowship with other believers who employ musical instruments in their worship services.

	SD	D	A	SA
23				
22				
21				
20				
19				
18				
17				
16				
15				
14				
13				
12				
11				
10				
9				
8				
7				
6				
5				
4				
3				
2				
1				
	B	A	B	A

DEIGEN = DEITY IN GENERAL**Legend: SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree****Legend: A = agree; SA = strongly agree****Legend: B = before (pre-test)****Legend: A = after (post-test)****Legend: Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, and so one) = number of responses**

	SD	D	A	SA
23				
22				
21				
20				
19				
18				
17				
16				
15				
14				
13				
12				
11				
10				
9				
8				
7				
6				
5				
4				
3				
2				
1				
	B	A	B	A

	SD	D	A	SA
23				
22				
21				
20				
19				
18				
17				
16				
15				
14				
13				
12				
11				
10				
9				
8				
7				
6				
5				
4				
3				
2				
1				
	B	A	B	A

DEIMAT = DEITY IN MATTHEW**Legend: SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree****Legend: A = agree; SA = strongly agree****Legend: B = before (pre-test)****Legend: A = after (post-test)****Legend: Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, and so one) = number of responses**

19.	The teaching in Matthew 7:15 refers to those who rejected Jesus' Messiahship .						
	SD	D	A	SA			
23							
22							
21							
20							
19							
18							
17							
16							
15							
14							
13							
12							
11							
10							
9							
8							
7							
6							
5							
4							
3							
2							
1							
	B	A	B	A	B	A	B

Table 1. Pretest and Posttest Means**SDGEN = Sound Doctrine in General****1. Those who teach wrong doctrine are false prophets/teachers.**

SD = Strongly Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
3	8	5	166.67%

D = Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
3	6	3	100.00%

A = Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
9	3	-6	-66.67%

SA = Strongly Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
7	5	-2	28.57%

Disagreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
6	14	8	133.33%

Agreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
16	8	-8	-50.00%

Table 2. Pretest and Posttest Means**ISSGEN = ISSUES IN GENERAL**

2. Those who advocate solo singing in the congregation are false prophets/teachers.

SD = Strongly Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
6	12	6	100.00%

D = Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
10	9	-1	-10.00%

A = Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
3	0	-3	-100.00%

SA = Strongly Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
3	0	-3	0.00%

Disagreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
16	21	5	31.25%

Agreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
6	0	-6	-100.00%

Table 3. Pretest and Posttest Means

ISSGEN = ISSUES IN GENERAL

3. Those who advance hand clapping in the assembly are false prophets/teachers.

SD = Strongly Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
9	12	3	33.33%

D = Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
9	8	-1	-11.11%

A = Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
1	0	-1	-100.00%

SA = Strongly Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
3	2	-1	0.00%

Disagreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
18	20	2	11.11%

Agreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
4	2	-2	-50.00%

Table 4. Pretest and Posttest Means

ISSGEN = ISSUES IN GENERAL

4. Those who encourage instrumental music in the assembly are false prophets/teachers.

SD = Strongly Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
5	10	5	100.00%

D = Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
5	8	3	60.00%

A = Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
8	2	-6	-75.00%

SA = Strongly Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
4	2	-2	0.00%

Disagreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
10	18	8	80.00%

Agreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
12	4	-8	-66.67%

Table 5. Pretest and Posttest Means

SDGEN = SOUND DOCTRINE IN GENERAL

5. Those who promote unethical behavior are false prophets/teachers.

SD = Strongly Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
0	1	1	0.00%

D = Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%

4	5	1	25.00%
---	---	---	--------

A = Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
10	4	-6	-60.00%

SA = Strongly Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
7	12	5	71.43%

Disagreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
4	6	2	50.00%

Agreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
11	18	7	63.64%

Table 6. Pretest and Posttest Means

DEIGEN = DEITY IN GENERAL

6. Those who deny the Messiahship of Jesus are false prophets/teachers.

SD = Strongly Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
1	0	-1	-100.00%

D = Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
0	0	0	0.00%

A = Agree			
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Before	After	Difference	%
0	3	3	%

SA = Strongly Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
18	18	0	0.00%

Disagreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
1	0	-1	-100.00%

Agreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
21	22	1	4.76%

Table 7. Pretest and Posttest Means

DEIGEN = DEITY IN GENERAL

7. Those who renounce the first coming (incarnation) of Jesus in the flesh are false prophets/teachers

SD = Strongly Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
1	0	-1	-100.00%

D = Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
0	1	1	%

A = Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
1	1	0	0.00%

SA = Strongly Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%

19	17	-2	-10.53%
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Disagreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
1	0	-1	-100.00%

Agreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
20	20	0	0.00%

Table 8. Pretest and Posttest Means

ISSGEN = ISSUES IN GENERAL

8. Those who advocate kitchens in the church buildings are false prophets/teachers.

SD = Strongly Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
14	16	2	14.29%

D = Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
8	6	-2	-25.00%

A = Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
0	0	0	0.00%

SA = Strongly Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
0	0	0	0.00%

Disagreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
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Before	After	Difference	%
22	22	0	0.00%

Agreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
0	0	0	0.00%

Table 9. Pretest and Posttest Means

ISSGEN = ISSUES IN GENERAL

- 9. Those who promote or tolerate the raising of the hands in a worship service are false prophets/teachers**

SD = Strongly Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
10	13	3	30.00%

D = Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
10	7	-3	-30.00%

A = Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
2	1	-1	0.00%

SA = Strongly Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
0	0	0	0.00%

Disagreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
20	20	0	0.00%

Agreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%

2	1	-1	-50.00%
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Table 10. Pretest and Posttest Means

SDGEN = SOUND DOCTRINE IN GENERAL

10. Those who extend the right hand of fellowship to those that are not a part of their own mind set are false prophets/teachers.

SD = Strongly Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
10	15	5	50.00%

D = Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
11	4	-7	-63.64%

A = Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
1	0	-1	-100.00%

SA = Strongly Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
0	1	1	0.00%

Disagreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
21	19	-2	-9.52%

Agreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
1	1	0	0.00%

Table 11. Pretest and Posttest Means

ISSGEN = ISSUES IN GENERAL

11. Those who fellowship individuals in the Christian Church are false prophets/teachers.

SD = Strongly Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
7	13	6	85.71%

D = Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
13	7	-6	-46.15%

A = Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
1	0	-1	-100.00%

SA = Strongly Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
1	1	0	0.00%

Disagreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
20	20	0	0.00%

Agreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
2	1	-1	-50.00%

Table 12. Pretest and Posttest Means**SDGEN = SOUND DOCTRINE IN GENERAL****12. Those who push for unity and diversity are false prophets/teachers.**

SD = Strongly Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
9	12	3	33.33%

D = Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
8	6	-2	-25.00%

A = Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
4	3	-1	-25.00%

SA = Strongly Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
1	0	-1	0.00%

Disagreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
17	18	1	5.88%

Agreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
5	3	-2	-40.00%

Table 13. Pretest and Posttest Means

ISSMAT = ISSUES IN MATTHEW

- 13. The warning or teaching in Matthew 7:15 is applicable to those who employ the instrument in the worship service.**

SD = Strongly Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
5	12	7	140.00%

D = Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
9	8	-1	-11.11%

A = Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
7	1	-6	-85.71%

SA = Strongly Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
1	0	-1	-100.00%

Disagreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
14	20	6	42.86%

Agreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
8	1	-7	-87.50%

Table 14. Pretest and Posttest Means

14. The warning or teaching in Matthew 7:15 is applicable to those who allow solo or quartet singing in the assembly

SD = Strongly Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
5	12	7	140.00%

D = Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
10	9	-1	-10.00%

A = Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
5	0	-5	-100.00%

SA = Strongly Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
2	0	-2	-100.00%

Disagreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
15	21	6	40.00%

Agreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
7	0	-7	-100.00%

Table 15. Pretest and Posttest Means

ISSMAT = ISSUES IN MATTHEW

15. The warning or teaching in Matthew 7:15 is applicable to those who practice handclapping during a worship service.

SD = Strongly Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
7	12	5	71.43%

D = Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
11	8	-3	-27.27%

A = Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
3	1	-2	-66.67%

SA = Strongly Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
1	0	-1	-100.00%

Disagreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
18	20	2	11.11%

Agreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
4	1	-3	-75.00%

Table 16. Pretest and Posttest Means

ISSMAT = ISSUES IN MATTHEW

16. The warning or teaching in Matthew 7:15 is applicable to those who advocate fellowship with other believers who employ musical instruments in their worship services.

SD = Strongly Disagree			

Before	After	Difference	%
6	11	5	83.33%

D = Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
11	8	-3	-27.27%

A = Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
4	1	-3	-75.00%

SA = Strongly Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
1	1	0	0.00%

Disagreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
17	19	2	11.76%

Agreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
5	2	-3	-60.00%

Table 17. Pretest and Posttest Means

SDMAT = SOUND DOCTRINE IN MATTHEW

17. The teaching in Matthew 7:15 refers to the religious leaders of Jesus' day.

SD = Strongly Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
1	2	1	100.00%

D = Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
3	0	-3	-100.00%

A = Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
12	8	-4	-33.33%

SA = Strongly Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
6	11	5	%

Disagreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
4	2	-2	-50.00%

Agreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
18	19	1	5.56%

Table 18. Pretest and Posttest Means

SDMAT = SOUND DOCTRINE IN MATTHEW

- 18. The teaching in Matthew 7:15 addresses the ethical behavior of the religious leaders in Jesus' day.**

SD = Strongly Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
2	1	-1	-50.00%

D = Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%

4	1	-3	-75.00%
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A = Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
10	6	-4	-40.00%

SA = Strongly Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
6	13	7	%

Disagreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
6	2	-4	66.67%

Agreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
16	19	3	18.75%

Table 19. Pretest and Posttest Means

DEIMAT = DEITY IN MATTHEW

19. The teaching in Matthew 7:15 refers to those who rejected Jesus' Messiahship.

SD = Strongly Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
1	2	1	100.00%

D = Disagree			
Before	After	Difference	%
3	0	-3	-100.00%

A = Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
7	6	-1	-14.29%

SA = Strongly Agree			
Before	After	Difference	%
11	13	2	18.18%

Disagreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
4	2	-2	-50.00%

Agreement Responses to Pretest and Posttest			
Before	After	Difference	%
18	19	1	5.56%

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